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G-MEN DETECTIVE

VOL. XXIX, No. 2 EVERY STORY BRAND NEW April, 1946

A Complete Dan Fowler Novel

ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ

By EDWARD CHURCHILL

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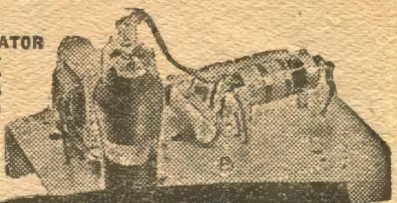

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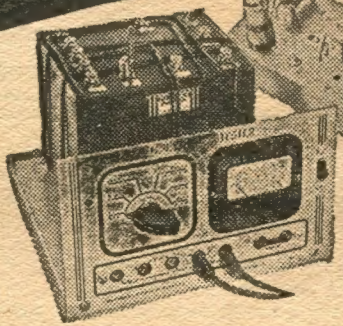

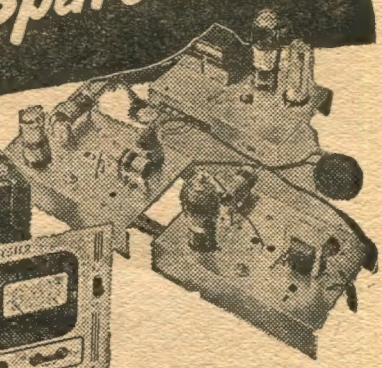

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A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

THE war is over—so people say. Oh yeah, we echo somewhat rudely. What's over about it? All right, so the fighting has stopped. But you'll admit the war's still plenty much with us in the form of vexing problems which include everything from mass unrest and mayhem in half a dozen countries—to that curious little gadget, the Atom Bomb.

You won't want to tell G-Man Dan Fowler the war is over either. Not after you've read a thrill-packed and danger-trimmed little package called:

DOUBLED IN DEATH

By

NORMAN A. DANIELS

This Dan Fowler novel begins in the closing months of the war, as a five-car passenger train winds its way along a tortuous course through a midwestern forest. The train is a very special one.

In each car ride eight M.P.s with tommy guns, and in the packed coaches are Nazi prisoners of war heading for an American internment camp.

One of the Nazi prisoners, strangely enough, is spouting loudly and energetically against Adolf Hitler. So it isn't long, of course, before he gets himself beaten senseless by his fellow prisoners. Shrugging, one M.P. goes for the train's medical kit. Another M.P. carries the unconscious Nazi to the train's rear platform.

He kneels and loosens the Nazi's clothing. Suddenly the Nazi's right hand comes up and closes around the butt of the M.P.'s big service automatic. He yanks it free.

A Daring Escape

"Do not be foolish enough to make a move!" His eyes are cold and deadly, and he speaks in perfect English without accent.

When one of the M.P.s does make a move, the Nazi shoots him, and then makes his escape by leaping from the rear of the train and escaping into the bordering forest before pursuit can be set after him.

The Nazi, apparently, has his plans well in mind. He steals automobile after automobile, abandoning each as soon as there is danger its description may have become known. He travels only by night, covertly raiding vegetable gardens for food. Yet, surprisingly, despite the fact that his prisoner of war uniform is conspicuous, he makes no attempt to get rid of it.

He makes a beeline for a certain farm in upstate New York. The farm is near a towering, quarry cliff, at the base of which is a lake. He arrives there at night.

After satisfying his hunger at the refrigerator in the farmhouse kitchen, the Nazi purposely lets a bottle of milk crash to the floor.

Then when the farm men rush into the kitchen to see what's going on, the Nazi makes sure they have seen his face and the large PW printed on his back before he flees.

Certain Death!

Now he heads straight for the quarry cliff, turning around once more so his pursuers will see his face before he goes over the awesome cliff edge. It looks like certain death for him.

Two hours later the local sheriff is on the scene. He and the others grapple the bottom of the lake for the escaped Nazi—and they don't find his body! But that doesn't prove he hasn't drowned there. Two other persons have been drowned in that deep lake without their bodies ever being recovered.

But the Federal Bureau of Investigation gets winds of the whole matter and they aren't satisfied. It looks too much like the Nazi purposely staged his whole "death" act in order that the authorities will write him off their books and quit looking for him. After a thorough investigation of the escaped Nazi's record, the F.B.I. decides he may not have been an ordinary prisoner of war, but an important Nazi—seeking haven in the United States!

Enter—Dan Fowler!

Enter Dan Fowler and Larry Kendal, Special Agents of the F.B.I., and, as you readers know, a pair of the cleverest operatives in the business. They fly to a city near where the escaped Nazi supposedly met his death in the quarry lake. From there Dan sends Larry into the neighborhood ahead of him to spread

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 6)

word that the Bureau can't close its files on the case until the Nazi's corpse is found, and that Larry intends to find the corpse if he has to bring in Navy diving crews to do it.

Shortly after, Dan himself makes his way to the lake at the foot of the quarry cliff. It is dusk, and Dan intends to have a look around. He catches a glimpse of a man through the brush, but decides it may merely be a curious villager, attracted to the scene by Larry's publicity.

A Mysterious Attacker

Then, out of the dark, a man attacks Dan! Dan finally manages to get his gun free and fire a shot. Then the mysterious attacker flees.

Dan follows after the man as far as the lake, but then stops when he sees something floating not more than a dozen yards off shore. It looks like a sodden log of wood. Dan throws the beam of his flash toward the object, gasps, and without hesitation wades out into the icy water.

It's a corpse Dan finds—a corpse dressed in what was a prisoner of war uniform with the two white initials PW still plain on its back. Grimly, Dan turns the body over and shudders.

"Now," he mutters softly, "my job is to find out if this corpse just happened to come to the top at this moment, or if that man who attacked me just dumped it into the lake."

By ingenuity and cleverness Dan finds out that the body is *not* that of the escaped Nazi.

And then Dan Fowler's troubles really begin. . . .

You won't want to miss this lulu of a story. You've read other exciting yarns by Norman A. Daniels in the past. But for thrills, suspense, and solid entertainment he outdoes himself in DOUBLED IN DEATH.

The Monday Murder

And, as a further treat in the same issue is a terrific new story by Wayland Rice—THE MONDAY MURDER.

Bert Royle wakes up one day with a headache. He looks out the window and decides it's going to be a pretty dark, gloomy Monday.

He goes into the bathroom, and he's surprised at his heavy growth of beard. Then he notices it's getting *darker* outside instead of lighter, and slowly the realization comes to him. It's not Monday morning. It's Monday evening. He has—for no apparent good reason—slept not only the night through, but the whole day as well!

Royle digs back in his mind to the night before. He can remember nothing out-of-the-way that happened then that could have caused him to sleep an extra twelve hours.

All that he remembers is that he was in a bar the night before and got in an argument with Hugh Clayton, a business rival, and that he wound up by poking Clayton in the jaw. But nothing more than that.

Then Royle suddenly remembers he has an important engagement on for that evening, and he hurries to keep it. But when he

(Continued on page 96)

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Screenplay by Roy Chanslor

Based upon the Collier's Magazine serial by Robert Carson

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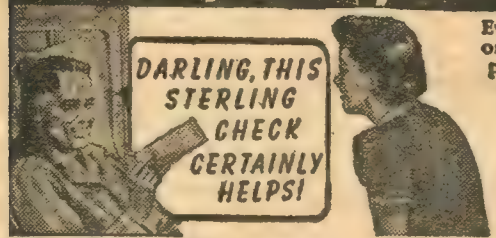

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A Mystery Novel

A figure hurtled from the truck, gun blasting, as Fowler fired (CHAPTER VI)

ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ

By EDWARD CHURCHILL

With a dangerous killer from the Rock on the loose, Dan Fowler and his aides battle against odds to stem a grim tide of violent crime that sweeps over the West Coast!

CHAPTER I

Rock Crushers

KILLER Joe Boyd, knowing that a steel-jacketed bullet might drill a hole through the back of his big, black-matted head at any moment, drew great draughts of fresh, salty air into his barrel chest at the surface of marrow-chilling San Francisco Bay. Not enough yards behind his hard, lean body lay Alcatraz, the Rock, dismal in the damp night air, coldly menacing—a cement-hearted mistress who had embraced him for five years and even now was loath to let him go.

Somewhere, not far away in the wisp-draped, icy waters was Boyd's pal, Harry "The Snatch" Drake, alternately straining his weaker muscles and smaller lungs in the same mad effort to flee a life which was no better than death. That is, Drake had been a pal for three years of preparing for the crush-out. Now he was, potentially, a hindrance. "Killer" Joe Boyd had no more use for the kidnapper who had worked with him to make the escape possible.

Yes, the granite-faced warden and the Federal rats who worked for him claimed that escape from the Rock was impossible. A

prisoner couldn't get free of surveillance. He couldn't whip bars, locks and alarm systems. If he finally got into the bay they would put lights on him and blow off the top of his bobbing head, or round him up with boats. Finally, the strong currents of the bay would conquer the strength of any man, turn him into a water-logged corpse.

The inspiration for the break, plus promise of help once it had been made, had come from outside long ago. After that pledge to aid him, Killer Joe Boyd had made a comprehensive, methodical plan. Then he had timed it. That was the secret—timing and planning.

First, he had needed help inside, as well as from beyond the walls of that grim prison in the center of the channel. He had taken Harry Drake into his confidence. They had first set their sights on jobs involving the maintenance of the powerful engines of the prison's launches and speedboats. As both had had experience as mechanics before stepping outside the law, they got the jobs.

The knife which had reached the hearts of two guards this night had been made from the handle of a wrench supposedly dropped carelessly overboard. For months it had been taking shape as a knife, always concealed in the bilges of the launches when not being hammered into a sharp, pointed weapon.

KILLER Joe Boyd had watched the tides and had developed his own tables as he worked on the boats. He had watched the courses taken by uncounted pieces of floating debris to learn the treacherous, deadly currents. He had observed the weather until he could tell by the feel of the air just when a fog would roll in. He knew the nights on which there would be either a fingernail moon or no moon at all, just in case the fog lifted at the wrong time.

For many months the two prisoners had tried to contrive a plan by which they could steal a speedboat, but had given it up as impossible. The next best thing was to take to the water, leaving behind them vessels with crippled engines—one with spark plug points touching, another with a gasoline line plugged, a third with a distributor head missing.

This night they had left their jobs with their work well done—for themselves. Then, by careful timing, they had made their rendezvous. Harry Drake had used the knife neatly and quickly while Killer Joe Boyd had choked, their two unwary victims.

Boyd lunged from the depths for air, dived quickly, swam for about fifteen yards with the current—not against it—wondering when their escape would be discovered. The next time his head emerged, he got the answer. Bells were clanging, sirens were wailing inside the prison. Huge searchlights darted over the water, filtering through the thin gray veil. The fugitive turned for an instant, saw the stuttering ochre of machine-gun fire.

He filled his lungs, glad in this fateful moment that he had cut out cigarettes six months before, had practised deep-breathing exercises, and had timed himself while he held his breath to accustom himself to the torture of lungs trying to burst under water. He had been smart to strip every bit of unneeded weight from his six-foot-two-inch body.

Every inch he went meant the difference between life and death. He fought against panic. The next time he came up, his small, narrow-set black eyes told him his carefully laid plans were menaced by a filmy white glow. Harry Drake was no more than fifteen feet away. He was limned in the fog-dulled edge of a searchlight.

"Save me, Killer!" he heard Drake shout. "I got a cramp!"

Killer Joe Boyd faced death—and Drake was the cause of it.

"Work your way over here!" Boyd shouted.

Drake floundered in his direction. Boyd rolled over on his broad back, treading water. He was thinking that with the searchlights on them, one head was better than two.

"Get on your back, Harry," he directed. "I'll hold you up until you shake the cramp."

The unsuspecting Drake back-watered toward Boyd. Boyd's hairy, gorillalike left arm closed over Drake's windpipe, not over his chest. His right had went to Drake's waist and removed the knife. The thin, luckless Drake fought for a moment—until sharp steel sliced between his ribs.

Machine-gun and rifle bullets kicked up little geysers around the pair. Boyd pushed Drake from him, looked at the fading walls of the Federal prison while he made bellows of his lungs.

"Shoot at Drake!" he thought. "He won't

mind." Then he went under again. This time, when he emerged, the walls of the dread prison were behind a curtain of fog.

Now Boyd played his final card. Wrapped around his body was a heavy muslin cloth, the type of cloth used in water wings. It had been formed into a tube. The soaking it had received made it waterproof. Boyd pulled a narrow neck of the fabric to his mouth, blew into it, sending air into the muslin roll which encircled him.

DAN FOWLER

Then he knotted the neck.

Even Harry Drake hadn't known Boyd had made that simple life-saver.

Currents indicated that he was moving fast toward the Golden Gate. If he had figured right, he would soon be close to the Marin County shore.

Using the dull glow of the fog-blurred searchlight rays to give him his direction, he swam powerfully.

Two hours before dawn, colder than he had ever been in his life, panting and spent, he felt his feet strike muddy bottom. His chest ached worst of all, the result of a bullet wound he had received in a gun fight long before.

But who cared about aches and pains now? He was safe for the moment. He had memorized the address where, in a small private garage, an automobile, clothes and a gun were waiting him.

They had taken five years of his life away from him. Now he would make up for it. Inside of a week, he would be a millionaire!

TALL, angular, rough-hewn Inspector Dan Fowler, for years one of the F.B.I.'s most resolute man-hunters, ran a ruffling, tired hand through his already mussed dark hair as his long legs drove him across an inner room in the San Francisco field offices of that organization. He stopped at the window, looked down onto the night-darkened city from far above teeming Sutter street. His square-cut chin showed what shaving advertisements called "five o'clock shadow," but it was nearer midnight than that hour. His usually clear, piercing gray eyes, set wide apart, were red-rimmed and bloodshot from lack of sleep. His face was heavy with perplexity.

He swung around alertly at the click of a latch.

A tall, slender and impeccably dressed young man of his own age grinned at him. Not so tall as Fowler, not so broad of shoulder, but alert-muscled beneath the perfectly

fitting sharkskin suit. Debonair as he was, he had the chilled look of the skilled sleuth in his twinkling eyes, which were shaded by a rakishly worn soft fedora.

Inspector Dan Fowler shook the fatigue from his body as he detected news in Larry Kendal's expression. After working together for years in the service of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, these two men literally read each other's thoughts.

"You've found something?" Fowler suggested, hopefully.

"Could be," replied Special Agent Kendal. "The Coast Guard patrol stumbled over a body on the beach just south of the Cliff House. I hopped to it. It's Harry 'The Snatch' Drake, in a highly malodorous condition after three days in the drink."

"But no trace of Killer Joe Boyd," Fowler said, his face muscles sagging, giving him a gaunt expression.

"Not a lead, Dan. We found out that Drake was killed by a stab wound, not by drowning. Same kind of wound as those in the bodies of the Alcatraz guards. Plain he hadn't drowned, because there wasn't much water in his lungs. We identified him from fingerprints at the Rock."

"Which means that somewhere along the line of escape Boyd used a knife on Drake," said Fowler. "One thing that it does show definitely is that our murderous Boyd was still alive when The Snatch went to his just reward. But that doesn't mean anything now, because we already know from several different sources that Boyd was still healthy a long time after that. Honestly, this gets me, Larry."

"Me, too." Kendal shook his head. "A sadistic killer like that, with a record a yard long. A rat who got life in Alcatraz for kidnaping. He's known all over the world. He's in every crime file."

"It's a challenge to me, Larry," Dan Fowler declared furiously. "For three days we've had hundreds of F.B.I. men working on the case. We've had the full cooperation of more than ten thousand local enforcement officers and of the Armed Services. We've broadcast pictures, descriptions and fingerprints. Yet the trail disappears as if Boyd had taken off on a magic carpet. It's the first time I've failed."

"What about Sally Vane, the beautiful blond G-lady?" Kendal asked. "She usually comes through for you. What's she uncovered in Seattle? Wasn't she supposed to watch Boyd's moll?"

"Just talked to her on the 'phone. The moll's moved six times in the last year. Sally can't even find her."

"She will," Kendal said, philosophically. "She never fails to get her woman. And some day she'll get you. She'll tag you with a summons to matrimony, and that'll be that."

Fowler smiled.

"I wish she would. For me, that'll be just the beginning."

"I can take my love or leave it alone," Kendal said. "But let's skip my bachelor tendencies. What's new? The last I heard on Boyd was that he'd been near Sausalito."

"That's only the start," Fowler told him. "He got a gun, clothes, and a car somewhere and lammed. A California Highway Patrol car picked him up east of Sacramento and shot it out with him. The patrolmen ditched his car and wrecked it, but he killed one officer, wounded the other, and got away on foot. He apparently hid out for a day near the California-Nevada State line. Then he stole a car at Reno, gunning the owner.

"Next he shot the proprietor of a filling station just outside Winnemucca, Nevada, when the fellow refused him gas without ration stamps. Filled his talk, loaded three five-gallon cans of gasoline, cleaned out the till and jerked a fresh set of license plates off a wrecked car. Then he vanished."

"Hear anything from around Winnemucca?" Kendal asked.

Fowler pointed to a paper-littered desk.

"Had plenty of telegrams and telephone calls," he said. "But there wasn't a follow-up in a carload. I've checked back on every tip. I've even run down a few myself. And there's not a thing. If—"

HE WAS interrupted by a knock on the door of the outside office.

"I'll get it!" Kendal exclaimed.

He hurried from the inner office and returned, holding a telegram toward his running mate.

"You open it," Fowler directed "I've had enough bad news for one day."

Kendal did, and reported:

"It's from a gent named Bill Agee, Chief of Police in a place called Fort Centralia. The telegram says: 'HAVE FOUND HEADLESS HANDLESS MALE TORSO FIVE MILES WEST OF CITY. MAY BE WORK OF KILLER JOE BOYD.'"

He tossed the telegram on the top of the already littered desk.

"You're right, Dan," he agreed. "Every time a killer gets on the loose every small-time peace officer with crime on his hands thinks the fugitive did it."

Fowler fought off the beast, and went for his gun as the dog leaped again (CHAPTER X)

Dan Fowler leaped forward and snatched up the telegram.

"Wait a minute!" he exclaimed. "I've got a hunch. Look at this!"

He turned, went to the wall map, where he traced a line from Winnemucca to Fort Centralia, a town the map indicated had a population of thirty-five thousand. It was located near the Canadian border.

"We know Boyd was driving a nineteen-forty Prescott sedan when he hit Winnemucca. That car has a capacity of fifteen gallons and cruises about fifteen miles to the gallon. In other words, with a full tank Boyd could only go two hundred and twenty-five miles. But he wanted to get a lot farther than that—about four hundred miles without stopping again on his trip and either getting picked up or leaving a trace.

"To cover that four hundred miles and still have a safe margin of fuel he needed fifteen more gallons. Put yourself in his shoes there at the filling station. Cars were passing on the highway, and any one might stop for servicing. The filling station man was lying on the floor, dead. Boyd was the hottest fugitive in the country, and he knew it.

"If he had wanted to go farther than four hundred miles, he would have taken the time to find one or more additional five-gallon cans and filled them. If he didn't want to go that far he would have loaded less gas. He stole just the amount he needed because every minute he spent at the scene of his crime threatened him with apprehension, the rope, the chair or the lethal chamber."

"Very neat," conceded Kendal. "But you overlook the fact that he could go four hundred miles in just about any direction from Winnemucca except due west."

Fowler smiled indulgently.

"Six years ago, when you were out in Utah investigating those interstate silk shipment thefts, Adolph Mannerheim, the brewer, was kidnaped from his New York penthouse and held on Long Island for two hundred thousand ransom. At that time, Butch Hogan, the Brooklyn gang leader, who had turned from brewing beer and running whisky in prohibition days, to the policy racket, gambling houses and kidnaping, was suspected of the snatch. Mannerheim paid off, and there was evidence to show that Butch Hogan got the dough, and he and his right-hand man and liquidator, Killer Joe Boyd, had a falling out."

"I get it now!" Kendal exclaimed. "If I remember correctly, Butch Hogan's butchered torso was found in a ditch near Amityville, Long Island!"

"Right," said Fowler. "His head and hands were gone—the killer had cut up the body to destroy identification. Killer Joe Boyd was tried by a New York criminal courts jury and acquitted for lack of evidence. But we later proved the kidnaping of Mannerheim was his work, and he went to Alcatraz."

"For life, and that wasn't long enough," Kendal added.

Fowler nodded.

"Grab a telephone," he said, "and charter a plane. This murder at Fort Centralia looks as if Killer Joe Boyd is up to his old tricks. Looks as if he might have squared an old account, and could have gone on to Canada. I'm going to call Chief of Police Agee in Fort Centralia and see if there's anything new on the crime."

CHAPTER II

Headless Corpse

INSPECTOR Dan Fowler and Special Agent Larry Kendal looked down on the battered, mutilated, nude torso of the unknown victim. Four men who had accompanied the F. B. I. investigators to the grisly grave not far from a majestic pine tree on the slope fifty yards from a little-used dirt road, also stared morbidly. The seventh man had been introduced as Sheriff Hal Twoomey.

The slanting, golden rays of the morning sun made the brutally butchered flesh even more repulsive than it would have been in a morgue or a crime laboratory. Fowler found it difficult to reconcile the hate and cruelty of such a murder with the beauty of the pine-covered hills, the rolling, misty, tranquil countryside.

"When I saw the timber wolf, he was chawin' on somethin' right here," a tall, thin man in blue jeans, high-heeled boots and flannel shirt open at the collar, was telling Fowler. "I rode over the rise yonder just at dusk.

"My cattle range here, and I been havin' trouble with wolves. I been watchin' for 'em. When I seen this big feller I fired from the saddle—and missed. The wolf ran into the timber. I come down here and found—this."

He pointed at the torso. Then he grinned sheepishly at Fowler.

"I was ridin' a new sorrel mare and she was

gun-shy. The light was bad, too. First time I ever missed a wolf."

"No alibis, Lem," admonished Chief of Police Agee, grinning at the cowman. "You're talking to the F.B.I."

Agee was blond, blue-eyed and young of face in spite of three years in the United States Marine Corps. Prior to that, Agee had informed Fowler, he had held his present job and had been graduated from the F.B.I. National Police Academy. Fowler noted his calm, hard-muscled body, his quality of alertness. He wore a green uniform of military cut.

Fowler drew a deep breath of clear, pine-scented air.

"Suppose everything's the way you found it?" he said to Agee.

"Agee's had me out here guardin' it all night," Sheriff Twoomey was truculent. "Nothin's been touched."

Fowler eyed the sheriff. The man was about fifty. He had only a fringe of hair around his squarish head. He was about six feet two inches tall, and weighed all of three hundred pounds. He had small, red-rimmed eyes, a flat nose, and a too small, thin-lipped mouth. He chewed with stained teeth on a frayed, unlighted cigar. Whiskers covered a double-chinned jaw which developed into three when he spoke. He wore a ten-gallon hat, vest with star on it, Western-cut trousers and high-heeled boots.

"Isn't the grave pretty shallow?" Kendal demanded.

"Shore is," replied Twoomey. "If it had been dug deeper and if rocks had been put on it, the wolf probably would've passed it up."

As the result of this deduction, he shot a triumphant glance at Agee.

"This here's a county case and it's mine," he added. "I aim to investigate properly. There ain't no clothes anywheres around. There ain't no other grave nearby where the head and hands is buried. There ain't no identification. The man's been shot once through the left side of the chest. And he's plenty dead."

"Very good, Twoomey," Agee said easily. "But your man evidently was killed some miles from here and some time before he was buried."

"What makes you guess that?" Twoomey asked sullenly.

"The wound didn't bleed during or after burial. The murder which caused the bleeding occurred hours earlier, and possibly miles from here. That makes it anybody's case."

He turned to Fowler.

"We've had posses out, Mr. Fowler, looking for clothing and the missing hands and head. We've dragged Snake Creek, looked in ravines and gullies, watched for loose earth. In Fort Centralia I personally saw that manholes, sewers, garbage cans, the garbage dump and the hotel were checked."

"Is your coroner competent to perform a complete autopsy on the remains?" Fowler asked him.

"He's a good man, and he has the equipment, including X-ray," the chief replied. "He runs a small hospital in Fort Centralia."

"Fine. There's nothing more we can do here. Leave someone on guard until the coroner arrives." He leaned over the torso, pencil in hand, pointing to the chest. "That looks like an old bullet wound. Have the coroner investigate that further. There may be other means of identification. Also, be sure and have him examine the contents of the victim's stomach to determine how long before he died he had something to eat, and what the food was."

ALMOST as an afterthought, Fowler placed the pencil in his pocket and drew out a knife and a small white envelope. He opened a wide sharp blade and began scraping the skin of the torso. He put flakes which gathered on the blade into the envelope.

As he scraped, Kendal, who had been eying a dark, stocky man wearing a deputy sheriff's badge, suddenly asked the man:

"What's your name?"

The man started and scowled at the abrupt question.

"Howard Collins," he replied. "Why?"

"Where've I seen you before?" Kendal queried.

"You've never seen me before in your life," Collins answered, his face reddening. "I've been West since I was in rompers."

"Thanks," Kendal said easily. "No offense meant."

Fowler finished scraping, closed the knife and sealed the envelope. He and Kendal separated from the others. Twoomey stayed on guard. Agee, Collins and Lem, the cowman, climbed into a sedan and headed back toward Fort Centralia. Fowler and Kendal followed in the coupé Chief Agee had placed at their disposal.

"Hasn't Collins one of the finest Brooklyn accents you've ever heard west of the Hudson?" Kendal asked Fowler as the car rolled away from the scene.

Arriving in Fort Centralia, Kendal and Fowler registered in the town's only hostelry,

Central Hotel, and went at once to their room. They unpacked their few belongings and were freshening up after their trip from San Francisco—they had slept but little in the chartered plane—when their was a knock on the door.

Kendal was in the midst of shaving. Fowler answered it.

In response to his inquiry a voice replied: "It's Bill Agee."

Fowler opened the door for the Chief of Police.

Agee's usually rosy cheeks were more flushed by excitement.

"I want to take you to Dr. Blakeley's hospital—he's the coroner—to see what he's found," he said hastily. "It's only a block and a half from here. He's turned up some pretty hot stuff, even if he hasn't finished with the autopsy."

Kendal washed the shaving soap off his face, put on a shirt, tie and coat. Two minutes later they were walking down Main street. They turned into Second, went into a two-story white stucco hospital. Agee led them to the rear of the first floor and into an immaculate, white-tiled operating room and laboratory.

Agee introduced them to Dr. Phil Blakeley, who was still working over the torso, wearing rubber gloves.

"Mr. Fowler," said Blakeley, "you were particularly interested in the victim's last meal. I found the stomach well-filled, and digestion had progressed far enough to indicate that the man was killed about two or three hours after eating"

"Nice going, Doctor," Fowler said. "What did he have to eat?"

"Some kind of soup, I believe. Lettuce and tomato salad. String beans. Steak and french fried potatoes."

"Holy mud!" exclaimed Agee. "There's only two restaurants within a hundred miles that serves steak these days—the Rendezvous and the Golden Eagle, both on Main street here."

Fowler turned to Kendal.

"You and Agee dig into those restaurants. Try everybody from the manager and the cashier to the waitresses and cook."

"I canvassed every place in town once," said Agee.

"It's worth another attempt, now that you know the exact menu. And you've got a better description of the dead man. Take along a photograph of Killer Joe Boyd. Maybe he and his victim ate together."

"Okay, Dan," Kendal said. He turned to Agee. "Let's get going."

The two men went out. Dr. Blakeley turned to Fowler.

"Now, about the bullets," he said.

"Two?" asked Fowler.

"Two. Here they are." He went to a white-tiled sink and pointed to the pellets, each of which was resting on cotton in individual paper boxes.

"The thirty-two caliber lead is the lethal shot," the doctor explained. "It pierced the heart. The thirty-eight caliber, steel-jacketed slug was shown in the X-ray photos you requested. I found it embedded close to the spine.

"I believe it had been there for a considerable length of time—possibly years—due to formation of scar tissue. It's only an opinion, but I think that it was there simply because any attempt to remove it would have caused death. It had nearly pierced the spinal column."

DAN FOWLER studied the two bullets. "I'll send these to Washington," he said.

"If you want a comparison microscope, we have one here," Dr. Blakeley declared proudly, pointing to a large instrument covered with rubberized cloth on the shelf. "It's our finest possession. Bill Agee had a tough time talking the county fathers into buying it."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Fowler. "In that case I'll send only the thirty-eight and the envelope containing the scrapings from the dead man's skin over to our technical laboratory."

He picked up the small box. Dr. Blakeley supplied wrapping paper. Fowler made up a small package, addressed it, and asked directions to the post office.

"Mind if I take you there?" Blakeley asked. "It's nearly closing time, and I haven't picked up my mail yet. You've kept me busy."

"I'd be very glad to have you show me the way."

Dr. Blakeley slipped out of his long white jacket, got his hat and coat at the office. The men walked into Main street. Fowler followed Dr. Blakeley into the rustic, log cabin type of building which served as the post office. Dr. Blakeley introduced Fowler to the postmaster, whose eyes showed his interest.

"Fowler?" he repeated. "You're Inspector Dan Fowler?"

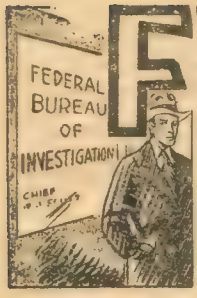
The G-man nodded.

"You may have a package for me from Washington," he said. "I ordered it sent here before I left San Francisco."

"Just came in, air mail, special delivery."

CHAPTER III

Enter A Dame



FOWLER mailed the package, took the one the postmaster handed him, and Dr. Blakeley got some letters from his box. They walked back into Main street together.

"By the way," Fowler said, "I've been thinking about that thirty-two caliber bullet. There's just a chance Boyd might have got a gun here. Who sells 'em—hardware stores?"

Dr. Blakeley smiled.

"We've a sort of monopoly here. Have a blind gunsmith, who's been around for years. He knows every firearm in the county." He glanced at his watch. "I'll introduce you. We'll have to hurry. It's just about time for him to knock off, although we can always find him He lives in back of his shop."

Dr. Blakeley led the way.

"There he is now—on the other side of the street," he said.

Fowler's glance followed the surgeon's indicating arm. The blind man, limping, led by a Seeing Eye dog, was reaching an intersection. Man and animal hesitated at the curb. The dog led his master to the opposite side as Dr. Blakeley hurried forward.

"Oh, Tim!" he called. Man and animal stopped, waited.

"Tim," Dr. Blakeley said, "I'd like to have you meet Dan Fowler, of the F.B.I. He's investigating that torso murder, and wants to ask a few questions. Mr. Fowler, this is Tim Cody."

The men shook hands.

"Always did want to meet one of you G-fellers," Cody drawled. "Just closed shop and was aimin' to get a bite to eat over at Bob's lunch. Be right glad to take you back and show you my shop."

"Some other time," Fowler said. "I wouldn't want to delay your meal or put you out. I just want to ask you one question—has anybody bought a thirty-two revolver from you in the last few days? Specifically, day before yesterday? Probably in the afternoon."

Tim Cody lifted his free hand, shoved his wide-brimmed hat forward, scratched the back of his graying head and screwed up his tanned face in an effort to think.

"I reckon not. I reckon I haven't sold such

The luckless Drake fought until sharp steel sliced between his ribs (CHAPTER I)

a gun in nigh onto a month."

"Thank you very much."

"Sure you haven't got time to come see my layout?" asked Cody. "I've got one of the finest in the state. Welcome any time. You're purty interested in guns, eh?"

"I'll bring Fowler around when he isn't so busy," Dr. Blakeley said.

"Okay. I'll be seein' yuh." Tim Cody limped away.

They watched the dog lead him up the sidewalk.

"Had to be abrupt with the garrulous old coot," said Dr. Blakeley. "Otherwise he'd have talked your head off."

"Thanks," said Fowler. "What happened to him?"

"Says he was shooting fireworks when he was a kid and a giant pinwheel went off in his face. The shock partially paralyzed his left leg. You have to give a man credit for overcoming handicaps like that."

Fowler nodded. The men said good-bye and the G-man returned to the hotel. In his room, he opened the package the postmaster had given him and scattered on the bed photographs of the members of the "Butch" Hogan gang and anyone else who had figured in the crime life of Killer Joe Boyd. He tossed fingerprint cards on another section of the bed. He put data concerning each member of the mob on the desk.

As he started going through the photographs, his eyes focused on a beautiful brunette of about twenty-two years. Her face fascinated him because it lacked all of the hardness of gun moll features, as typified by Evelyn Frechette, Helen Gillis, Marie Conforti and other notorious intimates of the public enemies of the Thirties.

Even in the police photograph, this girl smiled slightly. Dark hair crowned her head. Her eyes were far apart. Her nose was straight and pert. Her lips were full and her chin delicately rounded. So fascinated was Fowler that he ignored all the other likenesses. He flipped the paper over and read on the back:

Dixie Hogan, wife of Harry "Butch" Hogan, held for investigation by New York Police in Hogan's murder, May 14, 1939. Released under bond. Appeared as witness in trial of Joseph "Killer Joe" Boyd.

His curiosity satisfied, he turned to the printed records of the various criminals. He picked up that of Boyd. One paragraph caused him to stiffen in his chair, his heart pounding. He had started to his feet when there was a knock at the door.

"Come in!" he called.

KENDAL entered, his face hard with suppressed excitement. He was followed by Agee, who was livid with the same emotion.

"What do you think, Dan?" Kendal exclaimed. "We found out that a man built like a wrestler or a heavyweight fighter, about six-feet-two inches tall, had dinner at the Golden Eagle restaurant. He sat at the counter. The reason Agee didn't catch it before is that the night waitress, who came on at eight o'clock, was off when he made his first check. We routed her out. She remembers the mug well—so well that when we showed her a picture of Killer Joe Boyd—"

"She identified him," finished Fowler. "She said he was a stranger in town, that she never had seen him before."

"How'd you know that?" demanded Agee.

Fowler's intent expression relaxed for a moment.

"We know that Killer Joe Boyd came to Fort Centralia for some purpose, undoubtedly criminal. He apparently was seeking something. Probably he was willing to kill to gain it."

He picked up the record of Killer Joe Boyd that he had been studying.

"Listen to this," he said. He read:

Shot in the left chest by Special Agent Harry Botsford, F.B.I., during running gunfight in an alley extending from Baylor Avenue to Fuller Street, Thirty-eight hundred block, Brooklyn, October Fourteenth, Nineteen-thirty-nine. Steel-jacketed bullet from Botsford's thirty-eight automatic lodged close to spine and was not removed by surgeons at Mercy Hospital due to fact said removal might cause death. Identifying feature—bullet embedded in tissue at left of spinal column twenty-two and three-eighths inches from tip.

Kendal whistled.

"So Killer Joe Boyd came up here, maybe to bump somebody, and got bumped instead," he said. "Whoever that somebody was amputated his head and hands and buried him to avoid identification and to keep the heat off himself. He didn't want the Feds prowling around."

"Or for revenge," Fowler prompted. "Remember that the same butchering was done on Butch Hogan's body."

Fowler reached for the telephone, put in a priority long distance call for the F.B.I. Technical and Research Laboratory in Washington. It went through immediately. To the Director of Firearms Indentification, he explained the nature of the contents of the package he had sent.

"When the bullet comes in," he directed, "check it against those fired by the gun

Special Agent Harry Botsford used when he drilled Killer Joe Boyd. And pass along word to the chemical investigation boys to test the skin scrapings for a large salt content and possibly flakes of dried salt. They'll probably find Boyd had been in salt water."

He held down the stop for an instant, called Dr. Blakeley after getting the number from Agee. He told the coroner to measure the distance from the tip of the torso's spine to the embedded bullet and to check as to whether it had been on the left side. He said he would call the coroner later.

"Well, that's that," he said. "It's self-evident, but we'll back up the identification legally and with the findings of Doc Blakeley and the technical lab. Anyhow, I'm satisfied."

He glanced from Agee to Kendal.

"We're up against an entirely new set of circumstances now," he remarked. "We know the dead man is Boyd. He didn't go to Canada, or any other place on the globe, but to where all bad boys go. We can assume, without a great deal of contradiction, that he was killed here in Fort Centralia. He arrived, ate, and less than three hours later he was dead. Somebody sliced him up and buried him five miles from here.

"Let's ask ourselves some questions. Why did he come here? Who did he meet, or who spotted him? Who killed him? Where was he killed? What was the motive? Why were his hands and head removed—to destroy identification, for revenge, or for both? What became of the car he drove? How was the body cut up? How was the body taken to the burial place? I guess we'd better start at the beginning."

Larry Kendal leaned forward.

"One thing we do know," he said. "Somebody in Fort Centralia is a killer. I can't see anybody making a date to meet him here, and coming from some other place. The killer was waiting for him, like a spider in his web waiting for a fly to get caught in it."

"To me," said Agee, "we should begin at the Golden Eagle restaurant. Boyd had been afraid to eat on the trip. Probably he was darned near starved when he hit here. He was driven to food. He gorged himself."

"Who was in the restaurant?" Fowler asked.

"The cook, Bert Johnson, the owner and cashier, and the waitress who served both counter and booths. It's not a big place."

"Any patrons?"

"The place was almost empty when Boyd came in," Kendal replied. "It was nearly nine o'clock. Maybe that's why he chanced it. There were two people in one of the booths—Madeline D'Arcy, who runs a curio shop on the main drag, and Arch Andrews, a local lawyer."

"They're carrying the torch," Agee added.

"I think we'd better reenact the whole thing," Fowler decided. "We'll want all of the live principals. We'll have to wait until nearly closing time to do it." He glanced at his wrist-watch. It was after seven o'clock. "I'm plenty hungry. I could go for a steak myself. We can go to the Golden Eagle and see what the place looks like.

HE GOT a chorus of hearty approval. "By the way," he asked Agee, "are those steaks legal? They're rare these days —no pun intended—what with the OPA and red points."

Agee grinned.

"Some are and some aren't. I can get you legal ones, though. I know how you fellows feel about rackets. However, there are a lot of cattle in this country. Sometimes a steer has an unavoidable accident, like our friend Boyd had. Then, somehow, the steer shows up at the Rendezvous or the Golden Eagle."

"Which means," suggested Fowler, "that somebody looks the wrong way at the right

[Turn page]

time, and that it's probably Sheriff Twoomey."

"I'm not saying," Agee countered.

Kendal, who had been studying the photographs of the members of the Hogan gang, suddenly picked up one and grabbed Fowler's arm.

Fowler looked at the picture.

"Who is it?" Kendal asked.

Fowler and Agee eyed the likeness.

"I would say offhand," volunteered Fowler, "that the gentleman is Deputy Sheriff Howard Collins, the son of the Golden West with the Brooklyn accent, taken when he was about five years younger."

"You are now the apple of teacher's eye," Kendal said.

He turned the picture over. The caption read:

Antonio "Tony" Blue. Nickname, "Absent-minded Tony."

"He certainly is," agreed Kendal. "To think he'd forget all about life in Brooklyn."

Fowler showed them the caption which read:

Minor member Hogan gang. Held on suspicion of murder of Guiseppe "Muddy Mary" Marinello, August 15, 1937. After evidence was gathered by Kings County district attorney's investigators he was indicted for murder by grand jury. Tried in Kings County Court. Acquitted February 19, 1938. Believed to have gone West.

"Nice, wholesome people you have around here, Agee," Kendal said.

Fowler reached for the telephone, got Sheriff Twoomey's number from Agee and called. He heard the slurred, drawling voice of the sheriff.

"Twoomey," he said, "this is Fowler. Is your deputy, Collins, there? I want you to keep him there until I arrive. I want to talk to him. You won't? Listen, Twoomey! How'd you like to explain how steaks get from steers to two local restaurants? Oh, you'll hold him after all? I'll be right over."

He slammed up the receiver, and turned to the others.

"He's too dumb to know that the F.B.I. doesn't investigate steaks," Fowler said.

"You're entirely wrong, Mr. Inspector," said Kendal, grabbing his hat. "I'm heading for the Golden Eagle right now to do just that. Providing they're not the black market kind. As Agee says, there's no use encouraging any rackets. They grow too fast with patronage."

"You fellows go ahead," Fowler said. "I'm going to have a look in on Tony Blue, alias Collins, and join you later."

CHAPTER IV

Who Is She?

AGEE and Kendal were just finishing their desserts when Dan Fowler walked into the Golden Eagle. He sat down beside Kendal in one of the booths, studying the small eating establishment as he did, and placed his order.

"What about Collins, alias Blue?" Kendal asked.

"He broke down, all right. I caught him with his back to me, called 'Hey, Absent-minded,' and he swung around as if he'd been shot at. That got him. He spilled his whole past—that is, his version. I called national headquarters, got a quick check on whether he was wanted or not, but there was no red card against him.

"Twoomey says he's going stranght and that he wouldn't consider firing him. Said he'd guarantee Tony. If he guaranteed a watch I'd throw it away. But I just dropped the whole matter then and there. There's no use putting the hoodlum in jail, even if we could. Better to let him loose. Maybe he'll lead us to some more of Hogan's Brooklyn gang, and maybe he'll hang himself."

Kendal nodded approval.

Fowler hurried through his meal. The restaurant was nearly empty now, he discovered, as he looked around.

"Might as well get started," he told his companions. "Agee, you said you'd contacted both the D'Arcy dame and her lawyer friend, Arch Andrews. How's about fetching 'em?"

"You bet," said Agee. He rose, left the café.

"What's for me?" Kendal asked.

"While I finish this apple pie, you call Doc Blakeley and find out how far it is from a spine tip to where a bullet used to be."

Kendall nodded, got the use of the telephone from the proprietor. Fowler concentrated on the pie. Kendal returned in a couple of minutes.

"How far?" asked Fowler.

"Twenty-two and five-sixteenths inches."

"I'll settle for that. After all, what's a sixteenth? Boyd had been sitting down a lot."

"Doc says your spine shortens as you get older."

A furtive, squint-eyed little man, bow-legged, and about the size of an ex-jockey, sidled up to the table. He seemed to have come from nowhere. He talked from the side of his mouth.

"You fellas strangers in town, eh?" he asked.

"Sure," said Kendal. "What's on your mind?"

The gnomish fellow glanced around quickly. The proprietor was busy making change.

"You know there ain't no scotch in this town, nor anywhere for that matter. You look like a couple of good sports. Now, I got connections. I can slip you a case of McBray and Meigs for sixty bucks—deliver it right to your hotel room."

The proprietor bore down on the booth.

"Scram, Billy!" he snorted.

Billy filtered away like water through litmus paper.

"If you get annoyed again, holler," the proprietor told Fowler.

"What was that strange thing?" Fowler asked.

"Billy Hornbeak. He sells scotch hooch from over the Border. But his prices are high. I can get you the same stuff for fifty-five."

The last customer waited at the cigar counter. The owner hurried away to take his money.

Kendal shook his head dazedly.

"First it's murdered torsos, then Brooklyn gangsters, then unrationed meat, and now bootleg hooch. I'm afraid this is getting me."

There was a bustle and stir at the door. A statuesque blonde and a man of about thirty-five were literally being herded into the place by Agee.

"But this is an outrage!" the woman was protesting "I don't care if it is the F.B.I.! I simply won't be treated this way!"

"Now, Madeline," soothed the man, whom Fowler and Kendal immediately assumed was Arch Andrews, "this isn't a formal investigation. You've done nothing wrong, and you've nothing to fear. I'll inform the gentlemen that your civil rights are not to be violated."

The blonde started for the door. Only Arch Andrews' ready arm restrained her. Fowler darted forward, followed by Kendal. He smiled at the blonde.

"Mrs. D'Arcy?" he asked, smiling.

She nodded. He introduced himself and his companion.

"This'll only take a minute. I want you to assume the places in the booth you occupied night before last. Just remain there for a few minutes, until I tell you to leave."

"This is ridiculous!" Mrs. D'Arcy began.

"Glad to be of service," said Arch Andrews. "Come Madeline."

HE TOOK her firmly by the arm and led her to a booth. They found their places. Agee turned to the owner.

"Demetrios, you go behind your counter, like I told you."

He turned to the waitress.

"Gracie, what seat did the man take?"

"That one." She pointed to the third from the end.

"Very good," said Fowler. "Now, I'll be the man."

He walked outside the building and came in. He hung his hat on a rack, went to his seat.

"Did I hang my hat in the right place?" he asked Gracie.

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Now I order. I eat. I'm through. Mrs. D'Arcy and Arch Andrews are still in the booth?"

"Yes, sir." Gracie lowered her voice to a whisper. "I want to see you about that after they go."

Fowler nodded.

"Now give me my check."

The girl complied.

He rose, went to Demetrois.

"Now what did he do?" he asked.

"He paid his check, turned to the left, got his hat, and went out the door."

Fowler did as he was told, came back in.

"Did I do it right?" he asked Demetrios.

"You did."

Fowler hurried to Mrs. D'Arcy and her escort. He looked down at the blonde. Something troubled him. He couldn't put his finger on the spot in his mind which was doing nip-ups.

"That'll be all, Mrs. D'Arcy," he said. "I want to thank you both very much."

"You're quite welcome," the woman replied.

Her manner was totally changed now. Fowler caught Andrews' almost imperceptible nod of approval to her for her performance. Andrews rose and assisted her from the booth. He stuck his hand out to Fowler, who shook it.

"We'll be running along," he said.

Fowler watched them go, his mind still groping. Alice, the waitress, motioned to him.

"What I wanted to tell you, Mr. Fowler, was that their positions in the booth was reversed. Just now, he was facin' the door. Before, she was facin' the door. About halfway through the meal she wanted to go. I thought they was having a fight. He grabbed her by the wrist, and I heard him say, 'Shut up, you fool. You'll stay here'."

"Did you hear anything else?"

"No. Just them words. He sort of hissed 'em."

"Fine, Alice. Thank you very much." He turned to Demetrios. "Thanks," he said. "I'm sorry I've put you to this trouble, but in a case like this, we can't miss a point."

He turned, walked out of the café. Agee and Kendal followed.

"What do you make of it?" Agee asked, when they were outside.

"There's a cog spinning loose in my brain, and I don't know all the answers, but I can tell you this much. The thing I originally wanted to find out, I found out. Boyd looked in and thought the place was empty. He came in, went through all the business of eating his meal and left without ever seeing anyone in that booth. At no time was he in a position where he could see either Mrs. D'Arcy or Andrews.

"But Mrs. D'Arcy could see him. So we know at least half a dozen people, including Demetrios and the café help, saw Boyd up to that point. Incidentally, Demetrios, the last person to see him in the café, doesn't know which way he went when he left, whether he was on foot or used an automobile."

"That automobile thing has me stuck," said Kendal. "Agee's had every available man looking for it. I think I'll walk over to the station with him and see if they've found it."

"Okay," said Fowler. "I'm going to duck back to the hotel and see if I can unscramble my brains."

Preoccupied, Fowler walked down Main street, entered the hotel, got his key, and went to his room. He began pacing up and down methodically, torturing his mind into some kind of action. He had paced for several minutes when the truth struck him like a bolt of light. Madeline D'Arcy was a blonde and the proprietor of a curio shop in Fort Centralia. Dixie Hogan, widow of Butch Hogan, gang chief, of Brooklyn, was a brunette.

But they happened to be one and the same person!

FOWLER stood rigidly still as he contemplated the implications. Killer Joe Boyd, a member of the Hogan gang. Collins, alias Tony Blue, same. Mrs. Dixie Hogan.

Finally he turned, bent over to pick up the picture of Dixie Hogan and study it again. As he did there was a crash of glass and a stinging splatter of plaster on a line with the area his head had just occupied. He continued to bend, threw himself sideward, whipped his automatic from its shoulder holster and shattered the light globe with a bullet. At the same time he leaped toward the window through the darkness, gun ready.

He peered from a corner of the window frame. Outside, the glare of street lights turned the flat roof of the building opposite into contrasting, stygian blackness. Below there was shouting, and feet were pounding on the pavement. He raced downstairs, gun in hand, through the lobby and into the street. He met Kendal racing toward him, clutching his own automatic.

"What's up?" Kendal shouted.

Fowler gave a staccato explanation.

"Follow me," he said then.

They raced to the back of the building, but saw no one. They worked their way up it, Kendal taking cover on one side and Fowler the other. The two reached the end without trace of the assailant, nor was there any sign of him in the adjoining streets.

"Maybe he's in the building," Kendal suggested.

They found the rear door locked. A metal fire-escape extended to within about seven feet of the ground. Fowler seized the bottom rung, swung up it, and found himself alone on a gravel roof. Kendal was coming up behind. Fowler pulled out a pocket flashlight and penciled its ray about the surface of the roof. His companion did the same thing.

"No ejected shell, no footprints possible on the gravel, and not even a cigarette butt," Fowler finally said, as he switched off the torch. "We might as well go back to the room." Then he brought himself up short and demanded. "Say—where's Agee?"

"He took a powder just after we left the Golden Eagle," Kendal replied, realizing the significance of the question with a jolt. "When we reached his car he suddenly said he had some unfinished business, excused himself, and climbed into it. I went on to the police station. There wasn't any trace of the car Boyd drove. I was on my way

back to the hotel when I heard a loud report and then a muffled one."

"I shot out the light," Fowler said.

They went to their room. There they found there was no hope of using the bullet for identification purposes. It had mushroomed against the wall plaster and had been cut to pieces by the abrasive action. As Fowler found the bullet and studied it, he told his associate about his discovery that Dixie Hogan and Madeline D'Arcy were the same person. Kendal exclaimed, studied the photograph and agreed.

Fowler looked in the telephone book, jotted down a couple of addresses.

"I've a craving to ask Mrs. D'Arcy a few questions," he said. "Let's get going."

CHAPTER V

Trap in the Night

DAN FOWLER jammed his hat on his head. Kendal grabbed his own headgear and they went to the lobby. They were accosted by the manager.

"I'm so sorry that happened," he said lugubriously. "I'm having a man make repairs right away."

Fowler slapped him on the shoulder.

"It's all my fault," he replied. "Put it on my bill. I'm old enough to know I ought to pull my shades down."

The men went out into the night, got the coupé Agee had loaned them and drove to an address on Maple avenue. It proved to be a white frame one-story cottage surrounded by trees. All lights were out. Kendal automatically slipped to the rear among some shrubs to watch the back door as Fowler went onto the front porch and rang the bell. The men could hear it distinctly. Fowler pressed the button again and again, but there was no response.

Kendal returned to the front.

"Apparently nobody's sleeping," he said. "Windows are all closed and locked. There's no garage. Probably hasn't a car."

"Then we'll try the next address. Maybe Mr. Archibald Andrews has some ideas—or even a visitor."

They climbed into the car and drove to a more pretentious two-story home, set well back among the trees, on Summit street. They followed the same procedure. This time, after several rings, they had more luck. Lights went on.

"Who's there?" a voice asked from inside the front door.

"Fowler, Federal Bureau of Investigation," the G-man replied.

At the sound of voices, Kendal ran up on the porch. The door opened slowly. Arch Andrews was wearing a bathrobe over his pajamas and blinked sleepily. Fowler looked at the bulge in its pocket.

"May we come in?" he asked.

"Certainly, certainly," the lawyer replied. He ran his hand through his rumpled hair. "Excuse my appearance. I'm not used to having callers at this time of night."

Fowler pointed to the bulging pocket.

"I see you're well prepared to greet them."

Andrews grinned sheepishly.

"You forget this is the wild, wild West."

"Mind if I look at the greeting card?"

"Not at all."

The lawyer produced a .32-caliber revolver, handed it to Fowler, butt first. Fowler sniffed at the barrel.

"It's been fired recently," he remarked.

"Target practise," Andrews said smoothly.

"On whom?" asked Kendal.

"Jokes at this time of night!" exclaimed Andrews.

"You'll pardon my curiosity," the G-man countered. "So many guns seem to be going off around here these days I thought it was a Frontier Day celebration."

Fowler slipped the revolver into his pocket, lifted an eyebrow at Andrews.

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all."

"I hate to rob you of your protection. I could call for it tomorrow."

"That's all right. I've a shotgun upstairs."

"Much better at close range," offered Kendal. "It saves chopping off the head later."

Andrews led the men into the living room and switched on a light.

"We thought maybe you could tell us where to find Mrs. D'Arcy," Fowler suggested.

"I couldn't. Isn't she at home?"

Fowler shook his head.

"She's apparently taken a run-out powder."

"I can't enlighten you on that, either."

"You wouldn't be covering up, would you?"

"Mrs. D'Arcy is my client. It would be a violation of professional ethics to reveal her whereabouts—if I knew."

Andrews smiled blandly. Fowler saw that he might as well be fencing with a world champion.

"I think that'll be all for now, Mr. An-

drews," he said.

Andrews showed him and Kendal to the door.

"Better luck next time," he offered. A guileless smile still lifted the corners of his mouth.

"I'm afraid there will be a next," said Fowler.

The G-men got into the coupé.

"Now let's try something easy, like milking a tarantula," Kendal suggested. "I'd like to know what he knows about what she's done, what she knows about what he's done and both."

FOWLER raced through the gears, sent the car into Main street, pulled up in front of a combination all-night lunchroom, pool hall and bus station. They approached the man at the ticket counter.

"Know Mrs. D'Arcy — Mrs. Madeline D'Arcy?" Fowler asked.

"Shore do. One of our best bus customers."

"Which one did she take this time?"

"The nine-two for Spokane."

They thanked the agent, hurried to their room.

"She didn't waste much time taking off," Kendal said.

Fowler put in a call for Sally Vane at the Multnomah Hotel, Seattle. In a moment or so he heard her sleep-dulled voice.

"This is Dan," he said.

The sleep went from her words as she exclaimed:

"Dan, darling! I've been so worried."

"Everything's okay," he replied, and advised her of all that had happened to date, with the exception of his narrow escape from the would-be assassin's bullet.

"The D'Arcy woman's probably somewhere in Spokane by this time," he said then. "Get down there. The only thing I can tell you is that she makes trips there quite often. Your job is to find her and to stick like a plaster until you uncover what she had to do with Boyd's murder. I'll send a photo and data to General Delivery, Spokane." His voice softened. "And good night, darling."

Kendal was slipping the picture and record into an envelope when Fowler hung up. Fowler addressed it, took it to the desk, and returned to the room. As he walked in, the telephone rang. He picked it up.

"Fowler?" a muffled voice asked.

"Correct."

"You're looking for a car that was driven by Killer Joe Boyd," the voice rasped. "It's under a bunch of cut tree limbs. It won't be there long."

"Who's this speaking?" Fowler asked, giving Kendal a high-sign. Kendal had already started from the room to check the call.

"I'm just trying to help you, so don't get too curious," the voice replied. "Get this—you take Highway Nineteen due north toward the Border. You go twenty-five miles, see? You come to an unmarked road branching off to the right. Take it for three miles. The road starts around the rim of a gully. You'll see the tree-covered car down below. Step on it. The bus'll be gone by dawn."

Fowler heard a click and the buzz of a dead wire. When Kendal returned his superior was slipping on an extra shoulder holster.

"No go," Kendal said. "The switchboard operator did everything she could for me, but it was a public phone in a crossroads store about fifteen miles north of here that's been closed for a month. Somebody must've busted in."

Fowler got six extra cartridge clips from his suitcase and slipped them into his pocket. As he did, he gave his running mate the gist of the information the unknown had given him. Kendal wearily strapped on an extra holster.

"Sounds like a trap," he said. "My, my! What'll these boys think of next?"

In as swift a time as possible the trim little coupé, lights out, purred noiselessly toward the curve in the narrow road. Fowler drove. Kendal sat tensely peering into the night, his right hand cradling the butt of an automatic. Pine trees stood tall against the black sky, boulders were stacked like snowballs which had rolled down hill.

The road started to bend.

"We're here," Kendal said. "About fifty feet to the right it looks like the rim of the world."

His companion swung the car off the road, stopped.

"We'll stay near the car," he said. "Somebody might jam it up. It's a long walk back."

"And when one of us looks into the gully, the other'll keep watch," Kendal added.

They got out of the car, swiveled their necks as they strode to a point where the rolling land broke abruptly into nothingness. Both eyed the boulders and trees around them.

Kendal looked over the edge of what he

could see was a precipice while Fowler kept on the lookout.

"Gully, my eye!" the younger G-man exclaimed as he tossed a rock into the abysmal hole. "Somebody's moved the Grand Canyon up here."

Fowler heard a twig break in the distance. He made a clicking sound with his tongue to warn his team mate, who swung around. A gun cracked. The bullet struck a boulder and ricocheted. Fowler saw the flash of the weapon fifty yards away and stabbed a reply. Another weapen opened up.

AS THE two G-men took cover behind the boulders a fusillade stung into the darkness. Lead splatted against boulders, lead whined into the night.

"It's a trap, all right," Fowler snapped hoarsely. "If somebody hadn't stepped on a twig we'd be full of lead and over the precipice by now. Looks like there are only two of 'em."

"Let's give 'em the Eisenhower treatment," Kendal suggested between blasts.

Fowler's answer was to take to the cover of a boulder a few yards ahead. Kendal picked another and, running like a fullback charging a line, moved forward a similar distance.

Fowler caught a glimpse of a shadowy, indistinct figure in retreat. He took careful aim and fired. They head a low moan. The firing ceased abruptly, and there was the sound of the attackers crashing through the underbrush in full flight.

"At 'em!" ordered Fowler.

The men advanced, ducking now and then as an occasional shot ripped through the underbrush within a few feet of them or plopped into one of the trees. Then they heard the sound of a starter grinding, followed by the muffled roar of a powerful engine.

"Quick!" snapped Fowler. "Back to the car!"

At the sound of his voice there was the crash of a weapon in the dark and the bullet missed Fowler by a hair's breadth. He whirled and fired quickly in reply, but he hadn't seen the flash of the foe's gun, so the G-man's shots were wild. Again the foe's gun spat, but Fowler and Kendal were running toward their own car.

They sensed the plan to hold them back until the killers could load a wounded man in the get-away automobile that had started to move in the brush.

"Don't shoot again," Fowler warned Kendal. "They're running for it."

CHAPTER VI

Border Murder

OUT ahead, Fowler and Kendal heard the attackers' car rolling through its gears, and taking flight to the east. They raced to their own coupé, leaped in, and Fowler started the engine. He could not see the car ahead of them. Content to stay well back of it at this point, he did not turn on his lights. Frequently he shoved in the clutch and cut the ignition switch so he could hear the engine of the fleeing car.

The road turned north. The coupé bumped and jogged. When the sounds made by the car ahead grew fainter, Fowler speeded up. When they became louder, he dropped back. The road narrowed and was rougher so that Fowler was forced to slow to almost walking speed to keep the springs of the car from breaking.

Soon it was necessary to keep twisting and turning the steering wheel to remain on the winding course. The car started downgrade. Fowler turned off the engine, rolled along the steep, torturous path which passed for a road. He stopped twice. The first time they heard the soft, distant roar of water and the engine of the pursued car. The second time, they heard nothing but the water.

"He's stopped!" Kendal exclaimed hoarsely.

His companion found a clearing, rolled the car noiselessly off to the side. He set the brakes and he and Kendal got out. Kendal slipped a fresh clip into one of his automatics and unlimbered the other. Fowler drew his. They started down the slope on the balls of their feet.

Then, not ten feet from them, came the hoarse command:

"Reach for it! You're covered!"

Both men swung in the direction of the familiar voice.

"Agee!" Fowler exclaimed.

"Is that you, Fowler?" came the answer. The voice was filled with wonder. Both Fowler and Kendal were ready to blast in the direction of the voice, when the Police Chief added: "Thank the gods you're here! Come this way. Don't flash a light. Walk lightly."

The G-men hesitated, wary of another ruse.

"Come forward with your hands up,

Agee!" Fowler demanded. "We want to see you first."

Agee advanced, his arms in the air.

"I don't blame you boys," he said. "Sorry I had to run out on you. But I've been trying to put the finger on some hoods who have been running scotch in from Canada. This is it."

"Okay," said Kendal. "What's the score?"

"Come this way."

They followed Agee around a couple of bends to a ledge which looked down into a chasm.

Far below, playing flashlights and parking lights limned a huge covered truck and a tow car. Shadowy figures snapped off the lights almost instantly, both engines leaped to life, and the vehicles started lumbering up the grade.

"Coming this way?" Fowler demanded.

Agee shook his head.

"They swing around the bend to a little better road," he said.

"Let's go!" ordered Fowler. The three men raced back to the coupé.

"You drive, Agee," Fowler snapped as they leaped into it. "You know the way. Keep the lights off."

Agee tooled the little car to the creek, swung the wheel, and started up another winding road.

"Canada's just across the drink," he said. "The rum runners take the back roads to avoid customs and immigration stations. The truck can't pull this grade we're on, so a tow car helps out. With a scotch shortage in the States, the boys are cleaning up almost as much as they did during Prohibition."

Fowler grunted.

"Chasing rum runners isn't our job," he said, "but there are a couple of lugs in that tow car who tried to push us into the hereafter tonight. What's more, I think the murderer who bumped Boyd took a pot shot at me at the hotel, then later tried to shoot both of us and roll us off the edge of that cliff is one of the pair."

Agee whistled. He pushed the coupé as fast as he dared over the rocky, winding, climbing road. Fowler estimated that by this time truck and tow car must be about half a mile ahead.

Soon they came out on the level. Agee picked up to a speed which threatened to throw them all through the top of the car. Fowler, sitting on the right side, wound down the door window and swung out his pistol.

The huge truck abruptly loomed ahead of them. Fowler sent four shots into the double rear tires. The truck swerved to one side of the road and then to the other, careened half onto its side, lurched and scraped to a stop.

FOWLER leaped from the coupé, followed by Agee and Kendal. A figure hurtled from the truck, gun blasting. Fowler fired. The man clamped his hand on his right shoulder and the gun fell from his right hand. Fowler kept going, ready to meet the others in the tow car—but the tow car wasn't there!

He whirled on Agee, who was covering the swaying figure of Tony Blue, alias Deputy Sheriff Howard Collins.

"Agee," he snapped, "you bring Collins in."

Kendal had vaulted onto the side of the angling truck. He saw a small cowering figure. "Out!" he commanded.

"Honest," said Billy Hornbeak, from the corner of his mouth, "I ain't done nothin'. I just come along for the ride."

Kendal pulled him from the cab, shoved him toward Agee.

"You can have this rat, too," he said.

"I'll hike 'em both to my car, drive 'em back to Fort Centralia and lock 'em up," Agee declared.

Fowler was already racing for the coupé. He jumped in, started it, switched on the lights. He was rolling slowly when Kendal joined him. He nearly cracked up the coupé getting by the truck, roared into high and started pounding down the desolate road. It was smoothing out now, but still bumpy.

Kendal held his weapons in his lap.

Mile after mile rolled by until finally, Kendal said, in a low, tense voice:

"There she is, Dan."

A moment later, the back end of the speeding, careening tow car with its crane, winch and other wrecking equipment was outlined in the headlights. Kendal stuck his right arm and head out of the window, aiming at the tires. Fowler, driving with his right hand, poured more shots with his left.

The tow car swung wildly to the right, cut back onto the road, swerved to the left, and from the right door hurtled a large, shapeless vaguely human form. It fell across the road. The car ahead careened again, straightened out, and spurted forward.

The body lay across the road.

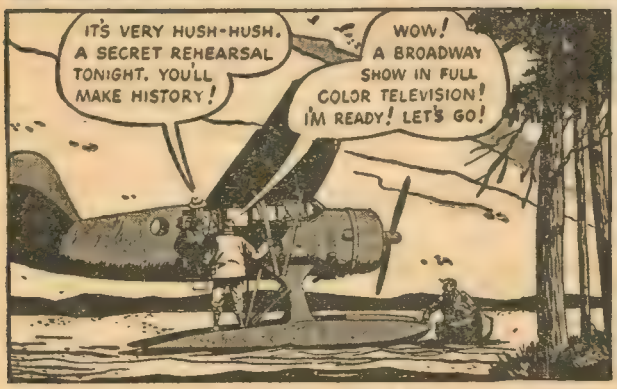
Clenching his teeth, Fowler jammed on the coupé's brakes to avoid hitting it. The little car skidded sideward, came to a jittering halt with its front wheels almost touching the form.

The G-men leaped out, rolled the form

(Turn to Page 32)

Bob Got Out Of The Woods In A Hurry When...

IF THAT BLASTED PLANE HADN'T SCARED HIM, I'D HAVE SHOT THAT MOOSE
LOOK... HE'S LANDING ON OUR LAKE. LET'S SEE WHAT'S COOKING!
BOB ALLEN, YOUNG ACTOR, RESTS FROM A LONG RUN ON BROADWAY BY HUNTING UP NORTH


IT'S VERY HUSH-HUSH. A SECRET REHEARSAL TONIGHT. YOU'LL MAKE HISTORY!
WOW! A BROADWAY SHOW IN FULL COLOR TELEVISION! I'M READY! LET'S GO!

I THINK YOU WERE MARVELOUS
JOIN US FOR A LATE SNACK, ALLEN. I'VE GOT GREAT PLANS FOR THIS SHOW... AND YOU'RE IN THEM
SEE WHAT A THIN GILLETTE SHAVE DOES FOR A MAN!

YOU ALWAYS GET REFRESHING, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES WITH THIN GILLETTE BLADES, FOR THESE ARE THE KEENEST, LONGEST-LASTING, LOW-PRICED BLADES YOU EVER USED. AND BECAUSE THEY FIT YOUR RAZOR PRECISELY, THEY PROTECT YOUR FACE FROM THE SMART AND IRRITATION CAUSED BY MISFIT BLADES. ALWAYS ASK FOR THIN GILLETTES
THIN
Gillette
4-10¢

face upwards. They found themselves staring into the sightless eyes of Sheriff Hal Twoomey.

"Holy mud!" exclaimed Kendal.

He and Fowler lifted the body to one side after they had made certain Twoomey was dead. They jumped into the car, raced down the road. After covering perhaps twenty miles at breakneck speed, they had to admit that by dumping the body of the sheriff in front of their car, the killer had managed to outwit them.

They turned back to recover Twoomey's body and to meet Agee and his prisoners.

Making all speed possible back to Fort Centralia, Fowler had Twoomey's body taken at once to Dr. Blakeley's hospital for an autopsy. The G-men stopped at their hotel, but in an hour had returned to the hospital for a report.

Dr. Philip Blakeley looked up at Dan Fowler from the mortal remains of Sheriff Hal Twoomey, stretched out on the operating table.

"Your bullet," he said to the F.B.I. inspector, "struck our late and unlamented sheriff in the left arm. He or his as yet unidentified companion bandaged it crudely to stop the flow of blood. The bullet passed through the fleshy part of his arm—there was plenty of flesh to navigate—and chipped the bone. You might look over there on the sink and see if that bullet wasn't fired from a Colt's thirty-eight automatic."

As Fowler did, Blakeley was working with long forceps. The G-man turned to find the coroner examining a second bullet.

"Funny thing," Blakeley said. "With all your marksmanship, you fellows missed."

"Try shooting through a crane and winch some time," Fowler had begun when he stopped short as the significance of Blakeley's remark struck him. "Wha-a-t?" he demanded.

"Sheriff Twoomey was plugged in the tow car by his pal," Blakeley continued, studying the bullet. "I examined and tested his vest. The bullet was fired into his left side and, from the powder marks, it was practically a contact shot. Your murderer apparently was driving the car with his right hand. He sneaked his gun out with his left, jammed it into Twoomey's ribs and pulled the trigger."

He smiled at the expression of incredulity on the face of the G-man.

"Furthermore," he said, holding the forceps closer to Fowler, "it might interest you to know that this is a thirty-two caliber bullet."

DAN Fowler glanced at the comparison microscope. The coroner washed off the pellet. They set it and the one taken from the body of Killer Joe Boyd beneath the dual lenses, and Fowler began his examination. For some time he rotated one of the leads. Then he looked up.

"This bullet is from the same gun that killed Boyd," he said. "Take a squint for yourself."

Blakeley peered into the microscope and nodded agreement.

"We've got to find—" Fowler began.

Agee popped in the door to interrupt him.

"We found the tow car abandoned on Holcomb street," he said. "Wiped clean of fingerprints. Harvey Hastings, the owner, reported it stolen when he opened his garage this morning. That makes the third one they've taken like that. The thefts started me doing a little investigating."

He noticed the tense expressions on the faces of his audience.

"Say, what goes with you?" he demanded.

Fowler told him about the matching bullets.

"Hal Twoomey may have been mixed up in a lot of rackets," he concluded, "but somebody was bossing him. That person killed Boyd, made two passes at me, one at Kendal, supervised Twoomey's rum running activities, and then killed him. He's still on the prowl and we're getting nowhere. Seen Larry?"

"He's down at the county jail working over your friend, Blue, and Billy Hornbeak," Agee replied.

Fowler got the number and stepped out of the laboratory to telephone. When he returned, he reported to Agee and Dr. Blakeley:

"Kendal says Billy and Blue are sticking to their original stories. Blue says he always drove the truck for Twoomey—this was his third trip—but that he had never carried anyone with him before. Twoomey, he says, always came alone in the tow car. He claims he isn't really sure that there was anybody with Twoomey this time."

"That makes Twoomey bumped by a phantom," said Agee.

"That phantom also knows how to drive a car and stop pursuit by tossing bodies in the road," Fowler agreed. "And as for Billy, he still says he went along for the ride." His brow wrinkled in thought. "The next step is to find out who owns thirty-two caliber weapons within a radius of at least fifty miles," he said.

"That won't be hard," Agee offered. "Old

Tim Cody has a record of every gun owner in the county. If he hasn't sold somebody a gun he's repaired it for 'em, or he's sold 'em shells."

Fowler reached for his hat.

"Let's go," he said.

The men were leaving the hospital when Kendal drove up in the coupé. On learning their mission he offered to drive them. In a moment or two they were going into the Cody gun shop. The blind, crippled owner greeted them cordially.

"Knew you'd drop around, Mr. Fowler," he said, and acknowledged his introduction to Kendal. "As I was tellin' you, I've got a modern, complete shebang here. There's lots of old weapons, too. Mebbe you'd like to see what some claims to be one of the rods Wild Bill Hickok sported durin' his shootin' days."

"We'll skip that today, Tim," Agee said. "What these gentlemen are after is a list of names of everybody in Centralia County who owns a thirty-two caliber weapon of any kind."

The blind man whistled.

"That's a mighty big parcel, but I can do it."

"Right away?" asked Fowler.

Cody, using his fingers and hands to guide him, moved around a lathe, passed a case of drills and tools, and opened a drawer. He took a ledger from it, and tapped it.

"It's all in here—every name, number and owner," he said. "I can get little Mary Twitchell, the gal that keeps my books and tidies up—lives back of the shop, you know—to come down tonight, and twixt what I remember and what's writ, I'll have the list for you tomorrow."

"That's a lot of trouble," Fowler said. "We'd be glad to pay you for it."

"Pshaw—it's for the gov'ment, ain't it? I'm right glad to help you fellers. Now if you'd like to see some of my guns and the way I work, I can show you."

"Some other time, Tim," Agee said. "See you tomorrow."

"That's okay." The men heard the tone of regret at having them go in Cody's voice. His dog rose, stretched, eyed the visitors sleepily as they left the shop.

"We might as well return Andrews' gat," Kendal said when they reached the sidewalk. "He couldn't have used it last night because we had it in the room."

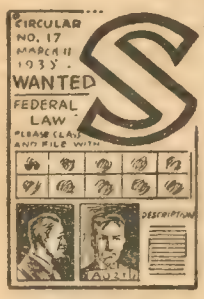
"Better than that," Fowler suggested, "we'll turn it over to Agee for tagging and safekeeping until we've cleaned up this mess."

The three men went to the room. Fowler opened a bureau drawer. He opened three other bureau drawers. Then he whirled on Agee and Kendal.

"The gun's gone!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER VII

Missing Lady



SALLY VANE arrived at the railroad station in Spokane wearing a powder blue tailored suit, a pert little sailor hat which slanted forward and down onto her smooth, wide forehead, the sheerest rayon stockings she could get, and high-heeled black patent leather slippers. Her hair had a sheen in the morning sunshine, her eyes were bright.

Sally really looked very much like a saleswoman for a wholesale house dealing in women's exclusive fashions, and a model for the product. Only her firm little chin and the set of her mouth could possibly give a clue to the most observant that she might be on a more important mission. No one would guess, however, that in the bright patent leather bag she carried rested a very business-like .25-caliber automatic which Fowler had given her, and which she had used effectively when there had been need for it.

Her first call was at the post office, where she picked up the photograph of brunette Dixie Hogan. Fowler had told her that the woman was now Madeline D'Arcy and a blonde. She studied the picture, then pored over the woman's record.

Her first six hours of effort at finding Madeline, though, were totally unavailing. She visited hotels, boarding and rooming houses which were listed in the newspaper want ads, the bus terminal, the railroad station, constantly asking questions which remained unanswered.

Then, with inspiration born of a quick mind and long experience, she turned again to the biographical data. One paragraph caught her eye. It read:

> Dixie Hogan has two children—John, three years old, and Gary, one year old.

Sally looked at the date on the record. It was 1939.

"Let's see," she mused. "John would now be nine, and Gary would be seven. Dan said

this Dixie-Madeline made frequent visits to Spokane. Possibly that was because the youngsters are in school here."

She consulted the classified telephone directory for private and boarding schools, made a list. Then she hailed a taxi.

Her first two visits were fruitless. The owners of the places had never heard of Madeline D'Arcy and her two children. At the third, however, she struck pay dirt.

"Mrs. D'Arcy," the principal said, "left John and Gary with us for about six months. There was—ah—a slight misunderstanding in the matter of tuition."

"You mean she couldn't pay her bill?" asked Sally.

"That's a bald way of putting it."

"Do you know where she took the children?"

The tall, austere woman nodded.

"I believe Mrs. Beacon, who operates the Beacon School for Big Little Men took them in. She can't say I didn't warn her. However, she's very easily put upon."

"Thank you very much," Sally said.

She left the school, consulted her list, and gave the address to the cab driver. After a few minutes' ride she found herself being driven up a curving drive to a large two-story frame house which apparently at one time had been the estate of some local millionaire. A sign identified the institution.

She told the driver to wait, went across the wide veranda and pressed the bell. A short, plump woman wearing a stiff white waist, dark skirt, and low-heeled shoes came to the door. When Sally asked for Mrs. Beacon, the woman wordlessly showed her into a study.

Mrs. Beacon rose from a desk and came forward.

"What can I do for you, young lady?" she asked. She was dressed as was the other woman, and wore tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses.

"I've come about John and Gary D'Arcy," Sally replied.

She heard Mrs. Beacon's quick intake of breath.

"I—they—they aren't registered here," she faltered.

"But they were?"

"They—that is—" The woman got possession of herself. "I must ask you—are you representing Mrs. D'Arcy in any way? Or are you a member of the—er—press?"

"Neither," replied Sally.

She reached into her purse, produced her credentials. The school head looked surprised and her hand shook as she returned the papers.

"You can speak to me in complete confidence," Sally said. "I'm mainly interested in finding Mrs. D'Arcy."

"I frankly don't know where she lives, Miss Vane. She refused to tell me."

"She's disappeared," Sally told her. "Suppose you give me the whole story."

"Mrs. D'Arcy," Mrs. Beacon said, "came here about six months ago. I had reason to believe that she was not financially—er—responsible. But the children were very sweet and very tractable, and I rather took pity on her. She said she was doing war work, and simply had to find a place for John and Gary.

"She gave me a small advance payment for their tuition, and then made a strange request. She asked that we tell no one they were in the school. Of course, I complied with her desire. She was a close-mouthed, mysterious person, though she called to see the children frequently. I was constantly forced to ask her for further tuition payments. She made promises, but no money was forthcoming.

"The last time she was here, I told her that she would have to place the children somewhere else within a week unless she met her obligation. Shortly thereafter, a man appeared with a note purportedly from Mrs. D'Arcy telling me he was to take them. He said he was their uncle, and paid the bill in full to date. Naturally, under those circumstances, I released them."

SALLY VANE leaned forward intently. "Will you describe the man, please?"

Mrs. Beacon shook her head.

"I can't tell you much. He called on the telephone first and requested that I have the boys' things packed and the boys dressed to leave. It was at night—about eight o'clock. He came and stood in the hallway. His overcoat was turned up around his neck, and he did not remove his hat. He had paid me, and was ready to leave when the telephone rang. I answered it. When I came out, he was gone. I hurried to the front door, and a taxicab was just pulling away."

"What kind of a cab?"

"A Black and White, I believe."

"Thank you," Sally said. "Now go ahead with your story, please."

"Mrs. D'Arcy appeared here late last night. When she heard what I had done, she at first flew into a rage and hit me. Then she became hysterical. Finally, she collapsed completely. When she recovered she left, threatening dire revenge. She said she'd wipe my school from the face of the earth. You see

why I was so loath to give any information. I really don't know what's going to happen."

Tears streamed down Mrs. Beacon's face. "I didn't mean to do anything wrong—I honestly didn't. This school—is all I have."

Sally rose, patted her shoulder.

"Don't worry, my dear lady," she said. "And now I'd like full descriptions of Mrs. D'Arcy, the children, and please—try to remember more about that man."

Half an hour later, Sally left the big, rambling building. The taxicab driver took her to the Black and White garage. There she interrogated cabbies until she found the man who had driven the kidnaper and children from the school.

"I took 'em to the bus station," he said.

"Then take me there, too," Sally requested.

On the way she tried to get a more detailed description of the abductor. It was dark, the driver said. The man had his hat-brim pulled down, and his coat collar turned up. No, the kids didn't like the fellow. The younger one started to cry.

"The lug hauled off and bopped him one—hardern' I'd ever bust one of mine," he said. "Made me mad."

At the bus station, none of the ticket sellers remembered the trio. Sally sought out the manager, checked with him in regard to the sellers on duty. Then she got a time-table. The cab driver stayed with her.

"What time did you get down here?" she asked him.

He went to his car, consulted his call sheet and returned.

"Eight-thirty, on the dime," he reported.

Sally eyed the time-table. Only five buses left after that hour. Two went to Seattle, two to Portland, and one to Arapaho. The situation looked hopeless until Sally saw that the Arapaho bus passed through Fort Centralia.

"He may have taken the eight-forty-seven to Arapaho," she said.

"I'll call the ticket sellers who were on duty at that time and you can talk to them," the manager said.

He did, and the second seller recalled the man.

"Yes," he said, "the fellow bought two half-fares for the kids and one for himself. The tickets were to Fort Centralia. I remember him because the kids were screaming like devils. They wanted their mother. They kept yelling 'Where's Mummy? We want Mummy.' The fellow dragged 'em out of the station. Guess he must've walked 'em around until the bus came."

Sally thanked him, and hung up.

"I'll take a ticket to Fort Centralia," she told the manager. "Will the same driver be on the eight-forty-seven Arapaho run?"

"He always makes it, except Mondays," he replied. "That's his day off."

At eight-forty-five Sally boarded the bus. Yes, the driver remembered the man with the two kids. The kids raised the very old Ned. Turned the bus into a bedlam and kept the passengers awake. The fellow got off about two miles this side of Fort Centralia, took a dirt road leading to the left.

"Let me off there, too," Sally ordered.

After what seemed hours, the bus slowed.

"This is the spot, lady," the driver said. "You walk right up that way. But you ought to have a big, strong man with you, cutie-pie."

He winked.

SALLY alighted, crossed in front of the bus, groped in the darkness for the road. The vehicle roared, snorted and, as it became just a red light in the distance, Sally wished she was back on it—in fact, she had an almost uncontrolable desire to sprint after it, and to Dan Fowler, who was only a few miles away now.

But Sally clenched her fists tightly in firm resolution. Dan had given her this assignment, and she couldn't run to him for help right in the middle like a silly baby. Besides, those kids were in danger, and every minute counted.

She had walked perhaps a quarter of a mile, intermittently using her small flashlamp to guide her, when she saw the dim lines of what appeared to be a deserted, one-story cabin-type house with a lean-to garage. She reached into her purse and pulled out the automatic. Holding it ready, she advanced on the eerie old structure.

She took a deep breath and knocked. At the same time she put her feet close together to keep her knees from knocking.

There was no answer. She tried the door. It opened easily. She thought she detected the sound of a moan, coming from a rear room. She was sure she did when she heard the low sound a second time. Forgetting the fear which dried her mouth, made her legs weak and her backbone like jelly, she darted forward toward the rear room. The moan came again. She faced another unlocked door, opened it.

She used her left hand to operate her flashlamp. It's inquiring beam fell on one small human bundle and then another. Wide, terror-stricken eyes stared into the light. The two children were bound and gagged, hand

and foot. Their little mouths were covered with adhesive tape. A woman's compassion and motherly instinct swept over her at the pitiful sight.

"You poor dears!" she exclaimed, as she darted forward, wondering how long they had been without water or food.

Her hands sought the tape which sealed the lips of Gary, the youngest, and at that instant, something exploded inside her head and she toppled forward into a void.

CHAPTER VIII

Brooklyn Story

HEN Sally Vane regained consciousness, her first realization was one of intense pain. Her head ached and pounded miserably, and she ruefully wished she had been wearing a steel invasion helmet rather than the over-the-brow straw she had purchased with the single idea of intriguing Dan Fowler.

She opened her eyes and saw that the sun was shining brightly outside. A moan reminded her of the children. They lay on the floor near her, trussed tightly, staring at her wonderingly, as if she was a creature from another world. And she, too, she discovered, not only had tape over her lips but was tied hand and foot.

"Those unlocked doors should have told me this was a trap!" she told herself. "And then, of course, when I saw the children suffering, I had to rush forward like a scatterbrained little idiot instead of looking behind me."

It was quite obvious to Sally that her assailant had stood behind the door, waiting. Whoever it was had probably seen her flashlight blinking on and off as she had come down the narrow, desolate, winding road.

Now what to do? The cabin, she saw, was very old. The floor was covered with dust and rubble. Whitewash was flecking from the plywood walls. The ceiling above her was sagging. The door was literally hanging on its hinges. That was it—the door!

At the point of weeping because of the damage she was doing to her trim new powder blue suit, she rolled to the door. Then she got on her knees and finally to her feet. She stood about two feet from the door, and fell against it. It was stronger than she thought. It failed to budge. Desperately she tried again and again, each time painfully picking up her battered body.

Then Johnny, his bright eyes warm and friendly now, began rolling across the floor. He managed to get to his feet beside her and motioned with his head as if to say:

"Let's bump it together!"

She nodded, and together they fell. This time, the door gave a little, its rusty hinges creaking and the lock snapping. Johnny looked at her questioningly. Gary was rolling across the floor. All three fell against the door. It groaned weakly, flew open, and they were catapulted into the front room.

The front door was far more staunch than that between the two rooms, and Sally knew that her remaining strength, with what help the children could give, would avail nothing. She rolled and hitched herself from one window to the next—there were only three—and saw that each was locked.

Painfully she managed to get into the back room again. Her hands closed over her purse. Its lightness told her it had been rifled, that the automatic had been taken. But it still remained a woman's weapon. She gripped it behind her with her bound hands, hitched back to the front room.

The children still watched wonderingly. She turned her back to one of the windows and from that awkward position swung the purse with all her strength. The glass cracked. A second blow knocked out part of the pane.

She tried to cut her bonds on the remaining jagged glass, but found this impossible. Then, using the purse to protect her hands, she pushed out the glass, piece by piece. The work was dangerous and laborious. She scratched her hands. The glass slashed the purse. Now and then she was forced to lean against the wall and rest.

The sun was far past its zenith when she finally sagged onto the sill, hitched her legs over the denuded frame and dropped in a heap on the ground four feet below.

The shock of the fall partially stunned her for a moment. She ached in every muscle. But she must make the highway, a quarter of a mile away. She must make it for the sake of the children, for law and order—and for Dan Fowler. And she must get away before the person who had slugged her returned and reduced her gains to nothing, perhaps killed her and the children.

That quarter of a mile looked like a transcontinental journey. She set forth, keeping warily from the road. The rough terrain made the going harder, but she stayed just

far enough away from the road so she could see anyone coming or going. What if the kidnaper returned, decided to move or kill the children to cover tracks?

By late afternoon, through rolling, hitching herself along on one side and then the other, getting to her knees and falling forward and then drawing her knees up under her for another thrust, she had covered about half the distance. Her clothing, she reflected, was practically in shreds.

INQUIRE as he might, Dan Fowler could find no clue as to the identity of the person who had unlocked his door, sneaked into the room and stolen Arch Andrews' .32-caliber revolver. He questioned the chambermaid and the only bellhop. They had seen no one. He took up the matter with the apologetic, but by this time, harrassed manager.

"My good man!" the manager protested. "Even if I'm sorry, what good is that? Everybody in town was in this hotel at one time or another yesterday. We had the Rotarians at noon and the Better Business Men's Association at dinner!"

Fowler did his best to suppress the wry smile which threatened to engulf his usually grim features.

"Just pretend I didn't ask you," he told the fellow.

Fowler left the lobby and was walking up the street toward the police station when Agee's car came skidding to a halt at the curbing. Fowler started to the car, sensing that something sensational had happened.

"Fowler!" Agee exclaimed, excitedly. "Deputy Collins has escaped from the county jail!"

The G-man leaped into the car as Agee swung the door open.

"How'd he do it?" he demanded. "When?"

"Seems like he hid his master cell key—all the deputies have 'em—just before he was searched. The night jailer came on at eight o'clock. Collins socked him with something, knocked him out. The day man found the poor turnkey still unconscious. They've taken him to Dr. Blakeley's hospital. The cell door was open."

Fowler shook his head grimly.

Agee stopped the car in front of the police station.

"We've got to get out a general alarm at once," Fowler said.

"Kendal's already doing that. He's inside now."

The men entered the station. Kendal was just banging up the telephone. No sooner had he replaced the receiver than the bell rang.

He picked it up, held it out to Fowler, who answered.

"This is Arch Andrews, Fowler," he heard. "If you'll come to my office immediately, I believe I can furnish you with a few rather startling developments."

Fowler grabbed his hat and told Kendal and Agee to continue to broadcast the alarm for Collins.

"Tim Cody brought in a complete list of the owners of thirty-two caliber weapons," Agee said. "I darned near forgot in the rush."

"Hold it until later," Fowler ordered, and darted out the door.

Five minutes later he was sitting in Andrews' office, listening attentively. Andrews sat behind his desk, smoking a cigar. Dixie Hogan, alias Madeline D'Arcy, sat opposite him, dabbing at her eyes.

"So, whoever he is, has stolen my children," she was saying.

Fowler put his hands on his knees, bent forward.

"You'd better let me have it from the beginning," he said.

Madeline D'Arcy sniffled.

"Very well," she said. "Shortly before my husband's—ah—death, he made a trip West, for his health."

"I can understand that," said Fowler.

"Out in San Francisco, managing the western end of his—business."

"What kind of business?"

"Can't we just skip that, Mr. Fowler? Anyhow, his brother represented him in California. His name is Steve Halloran. Perhaps you have heard of him."

"Steve Halloran!" the G-man exploded. "California's king of the rackets—until he disappeared when it got too hot for him!"

"He was very successful," Madeline D'Arcy agreed. "Butch, my husband, was making thousands, and even tens of thousands of dollars every week. He never confided much in me, but I know he was afraid of banks. He said bankers were crooks. So he conceived the idea of burying goodness knows how many hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of cash and negotiable securities out West. He confided in his brother, Steve. He told Steve that if anything happened to him, Steve and I were to share equally. He said he was going to draw a map."

"Did you ever see your brother-in-law, Steve?" Fowler interrupted.

THE woman shook her head.

"Anyway," she continued, "Steve doublecrossed my husband. It was some kind of an important business deal. They never spoke again. Some time later, my husband, whose closest Eastern associate was Mr. Boyd, called Boyd and me together in our library. He had two pieces of paper. The large one was square. The smaller one was jagged, and had been torn from the center of the big one. Butch said that he loved both Mr. Boyd and me very much, and that he loved Johnny and Gary, our two children, even more.

"He made us pledge that if anything happened to him, we would get the cash and securities. This time, I was to have two-thirds on account of the children and Mr. Boyd one-third. He gave me the large square piece of paper with the center gone out of it.

"Shortly after this he met his—with an accident. Mr. Boyd was tried for the crime and acquitted. Then he was sent to Alcatraz. All that time, I tried to get his part of the map, promising to use his share to get him out of his—difficulties. He simply laughed at me. After he got to Alcatraz, I saw that any further dealings with him were useless."

"By the way," said Fowler, "hasn't Uncle Sam a lien of about a million and a half on that dough?"

"That's correct," interjected Andrews. "My client has no desire to withhold any monies due as the result of income tax litigation."

"Go on," Fowler told the woman.

"I was penniless," she continued. "I had my two children to support. My parents had disowned me for marrying Butch. For a while, I got jobs around New York, but sooner or later someone identified me as Mrs. Butch Hogan and I was—my services were dispensed with.

"Thing got tougher and tougher. I came to San Francisco, hoping to make a deal with Mr. Boyd, but couldn't. I worked in defense plants and in the shipyards, and I still kept losing my jobs, because of my fingerprints, even though I'd changed my name.

"I did finally manage to get a little money ahead, and I came here thinking that maybe my part of the map would show enough for me to locate the valuables. It didn't. I was about to leave when Mr. Andrews offered me a job. He said he would start a curio shop, as the town needed one. There is a lot of resort trade, you know."

Fowler nodded impatiently.

"Goon," he prompted. "What about Tony Blue—Deputy Collins?"

Madeline D'Arcy paled, looked at Andrews questioningly.

"Tell him everything," the lawyer directed.

"When my husband took his trip west for his health, and to hide the securities and things, he took a bodyguard. That was Tony Blue. Maybe he's the one who wrote the ransom note."

"Good heavens, woman!" exclaimed Fowler. "What ransom note?"

"It demanded my part of the map, or else Johnny and Gary would be killed. Mr. Boyd had then just escaped from Alcatraz. Naturally, when I saw him in the Golden Eagle restaurant, I was terrified. That's why I wanted to run out, and Archie—I mean Mr. Andrews—made me sit still. He said Mr. Boyd couldn't see me where I was and didn't want me to attract attention."

"Where's your part of the map now?"

"That—that's the whole point. I mailed it."

Fowler leaped to his feet.

"Who did you mail it to?"

"To a Mr. Tom Price, General Delivery, Spokane, just the way I was told. I wanted to save the lives of my children. Now they're gone, and I don't know where they are, and I think I'll go insane if I don't find out something pretty soon."

"And Nero fiddled while Rome burned!" the G-man exclaimed, as he started toward the door.

"Where're you going?" Andrews demanded.

"To the Spokane post office!"

The lawyer glanced at his watch.

"That mail must have gone down on the nine-o-two for Spokane," he said. "If it did, it's probably at the General Delivery window there now."

"Providing," said Fowler, "that it was mailed at all."

He left the office.

It was doubtful if Fowler would be able to reach Spokane in time to intercept the man who would ask for the letter at the post office. But he had to try. And that meant burning up the road.

When he reached his coupé, his jaw was hard set. Putting the car in gear, he drove at a normal rate of speed out of Fort Centralia, letting the engine warm up. Then, at the outskirts of town, he stepped on it.

The coupé bounded forward, special rubber tires snatching at the road. He took the turns under full power.

CHAPTER IX

Kendal's Disaster

KENDAL, unable to get the murder of Sheriff Hal Twoomey out of his mind, borrowed Dr. Blakeley's car and drove north toward the Border. He found the spot where Twoomey's body had been pushed from the speeding tow car. Along the road, to the southward, were the tire prints made by the swaying vehicle as the killer had righted it.

But these identifying prints had no value to the G-man now, for the car had been shown to be the property of Harry Hastings. Kendal devoted himself to searching both sides of the narrow, bumpy thoroughfare in the hope that in the effort to get the hulking body of the sheriff out of the automobile, the murderer had pushed something else out, too.

He not only searched the road itself, but proceeded down both sides of it for a quarter of a mile, believing it possible that the fugitive might have ditched the gun he had used to send the sheriff to his death. After several hours of search, he felt sure that he had exhausted every opportunity to find a clue and wearily got back into Blakeley's automobile.

He drove slowly southward. It was almost sunset, and golden rays slanted across the road. He felt completely let down in the warm glow, and had to fight himself to keep his eyes open.

He drove for about ten miles, sleepily reviewing the case and trying to find some solution for the series of crimes. Then his eyes opened wide and he was suddenly alert and erect. Something on the right side of the thoroughfare had picked up the last of the sun's light and had metallically reflected it to his eyes.

Kendal stopped the car, got out, and picked up a small, jagged piece of metal about an inch long and half an inch wide. It was thin as a wafer, curved as if it might have been part of a small tube, and highly polished.

Continuing down the road on foot, he found a similar piece, another, and then a third. But these were all he uncovered, even after an exhaustive search. Darkness brought an end to his efforts.

He put the jagged metal fragments into his pocket and started driving into Fort Centralia. After some thought, he pulled out the pieces and sniffed them. He smelled powder.

As he stepped on the accelerator he was still pondering curiously.

It was after dark when he reached the police station. The night desk man greeted him.

"Harry Hastings has been tryin' to get you," the clerk said. "Wants you to call him. Here's his number."

Kendal took the slip, dialed. When Hastings answered, he identified himself.

"Just finished dinner," the garage man said. "Where are you? I'll come right down."

Hastings arrived as Kendal was trying to fit the little pieces of metal into some kind of a pattern. They made a tube, all right. The garage owner held out a section of cylinder about two inches long. Obviously, an end had been shattered.

"Heard this rattlin' on the tin under the seat when I was goin' out on a call with the tow car this afternoon," he said. "Thought maybe it was somethin' you boys would like to see."

Kendal took the tube, studied it for an instant. One of his jagged pieces fitted to its broken end. He looked up at the man on the desk, who was eyeing him curiously.

"What are you toting?" he asked.

"Colt's thirty-eight Police Positive."

"Loan it to me."

The desk man passed over the weapon. Kendal rubbed his fingers over the outside of the tube, saw and felt the lands and grooves which were on the inside of every revolver—except that they were in reverse. The grooves protruded and the lands were indentations.

Carefully, Kendal fitted the tube into the muzzle of the .38. It slid in with a curving motion. He held the gun up to the light, looked through the tube. He could see lands and grooves on the inside of it. He passed the gun to the desk man.

"That's a new way of making a thirty-eight fire a thirty-two cartridge," he said. "Somebody made this sleeve, knowing that it could be discarded. Once destroyed, the bullets fired into Boyd and Twoomey never could be traced to any revolver in the world. Probably it would fire only one shot at a time. But that was all the killer needed."

He eyed the revolver, turned the jagged pieces over in the palm of his hand.

"The sleeve is mighty thin," he commented.

"My guess is that when the killer fired the second shot—the one into Twoomey—the sleeve cracked under pressure and the broken pieces fell down behind the seat of the car. The smaller ones were shaken onto the road through a crack or vent."

AS HE spoke, he wondered who might have contrived such a lethal weapon, which could be used so cleverly to avoid identification. He now had the inside track on the killer!

Tim Cody, the gunsmith, might possibly know.

He rose, slipped the metal tube from the desk man's .38, returned the weapon to him, put the tube and the jagged pieces into his pocket. He thanked Hastings and hurried into the night.

He walked to the gunsmith's shop. The gunsmith would surely be there, as his quarters were in the rear, making it exceptionally handy for him in the face of his handicap. There were no lights apparent. Nevertheless, Kendal knocked. He got no answer. He knocked again. He suddenly found himself possessed of a desire to see the blind man's lathes and drills. Could they possibly have turned out a .32 tube to fit into a .38-caliber revolver?

He examined the lock on the door and saw that it was of a type which would yield to one of his set of master keys. Drawing a flat packet from an inside coat pocket, he went to work. In two minutes the lock turned. Kendal stepped inside.

"Tim!" he called in the direction of the rear of the shop, where the gunsmith lived. "Tim Cody!"

His answer was a flash of ochre flame. Larry Kendal felt as if his head had exploded, and he pitched forward on his face. . . .

Inspector Dan Fowler dashed into the post office at Spokane with such speed that his coat tails sailed out behind him, the climax to a wild ride from Fort Centralia in Agee's coupe. He faced the clerk at the General Delivery window.

"Do you have a letter for Tom Price?" he demanded.

The clerk eyed him suspiciously.

"A fellow called for mail for Tom Price an hour ago," he said.

Fowler shoved his credentials under the wicket.

"What did he look like?" he asked.

"Sorry, Mr. Fowler, but in this business, you concentrate more on names than on faces. The fellow was smooth-shaven, of medium height, and could be anywhere from thirty to fifty. He had a hat pulled down over his eyes. Sort of tanned, he was. And nervous. He drummed on the ledge while he waited."

"You aren't so bad at descriptions after all," Fowler said. "But not quite good enough. Thanks."

He hurried back to the coupé. There was no time to lose now. The kidnaper-murderer had what he wanted and would be hightailing back to Fort Centralia to dig up his loot, probably head for the Border, and possibly be lost for all time. With that amount of money, a man might well buy safety and security for years.

As Fowler drove swiftly, once he had cleared Spokane traffic, he sent his mind back over the case. Who could the killer be? His logical processes took up the evidence step by step. The killer was a man who, first of all, knew that Dixie Hogan, now Madeline D'Arcy, had part of the map which would disclose the whereabouts of probably three million dollars in cash and negotiable securities.

Evidence which Fowler had gathered showed that five people, at least, knew of the existence of the buried treasure. They were Madeline D'Arcy, her suave, quick-thinking attorney, Arch Andrews, Tony Blue, alias Collins, who had accompanied Butch Hogan west on his "health trip," Killer Joe Boyd, who was dead, and Butch Hogan's brother, Steve Halloran. Sheriff Hal Twoomey also might have known, but he was dead now, too.

Would the kidnaper-killer be Madeline D'Arcy? He crossed her off the list. Her children had been snatched, and her story about sending her part of the map for ransom evidently was straight. Arch Andrews? Could be. True, Fowler had left Andrews behind in Fort Centralia, but there were various ways to get to Spokane faster than he had himself—a more powerful car, a different road, short cuts, possibly an airplane.

Steve Halloran? Definitely he could be the killer. Blue, alias Collins? Collins had escaped from jail the night before, possibly so that he could get that letter at General Delivery.

The modus operandi was simple. Come to Fort Centralia, and seek the hidden wealth. Collins had done that. Andrews, already there, had learned of the treasure. Halloran, a marked man, his reign of terror in California at an end and the heat on, might well have picked such a prosperous small town in which to disappear.

Next, when the wealth wasn't found, the

holders of the map parts must be brought into the net. Killer Joe Boyd? That was easy. Plant escape in his mind. Offer to help his getaway. Tell him to come to Fort Centralia. Pretend that he, the murderer, had the other part of the map, and set forth that they would share equally. Then kill, and get Boyd's jagged possession.

THE other half? Keep track of Dixie Hogan, alias Madeline D'Arcy. She might come to Fort Centralia of her own accord. If she failed to come, write her a letter, saying that he had Boyd's half of the map—another lie.

Luckily, she had come of her own accord. Kill her, and have the heat on? Not at all. Play a waiting game until Boyd freed himself. Then kidnap Dixie's children. Killing her didn't mean finding the map. It might be in a safety deposit box a thousand miles away.

She loved the kids. Snatch them, and she would give up her part for ransom. Spring the trap. Get Boyd's part of the map. Get Dixie Hogan's half. Make it clean, quick, and get out.

Fowler couldn't get his mind off Steve Halloran. Where was he, and who was he? He couldn't be Blue, or Collins, because that mobster had been identified. His part was known. Arch Andrews, until a few months before, had been a successful attorney and a man of substance in the community.

On the surface, he still was. He couldn't be Halloran.

If Halloran had come to Fort Centralia, it was obvious that he would have to assume a new personality. Steve Halloran, known to Federal investigators, local police and to the public, would have to destroy his identity. The disguise would have to be drastic.

Who could Halloran be?

Fowler gripped the wheel tighter as he thought of Tim Cody, the blind, limping gunsmith. Dr. Blakeley had said that Tim Cody had been in the West all his life, and that he had been blinded and made lame by the explosion of a firecracker. Fowler knew criminals often made up stories about themselves to cover their pasts. Fowler could grill Cody about that story of his, but there were other ways of breaking him down, if he was the guilty man. One in particular!

The coupé was bounding into the outskirts of Fort Centralia now. Dan Fowler wheeled into Main street, headed for the gunsmith's shop.

CHAPTER X

Succor

EVERY muscle in Sally Vane's bruised body was aching, but she gritted her teeth and rolled to the edge of the highway leading into Fort Centralia. Dirty, disheveled, her clothing torn and bloodstained from small cuts, she sighed with relief. This was freedom—perhaps. She was careful not to get onto the road. It was dark now, and she might be hit by any vehicle which came along.

She lay close to the edge, and as each vehicle passed her, she rolled, tried to raise her numb, lashed arms as she lay on her stomach. One car. Two cars. A truck. Another car. Then a fifth rolled by, and slowed. Sally's heart leaped with hope. It was stopping, hesitating, as if the puzzlement, curiosity and disbelief of the driver were being transmitted to it.

"Back up!" Sally prayed. "Please back up!"

The car obeyed. A man climbed out and came to her. Wouldn't the fool ever pull off the adhesive? He reached out an exploratory hand.

"I'll be doggoned!" he exclaimed.

His hands fumbled with the adhesive. He pulled. Sally winced with pain. He pulled again. Pretty soon most of it was off, and Sally was working her mouth so she could speak coherently.

"Get my bonds off, please," she said, trying not to be impatient.

"I'm a'hurryin'," the fellow said.

Sally saw that he was a typical rancher, about twenty-five years old. Soon she was free. The rancher picked her up, set her on her feet.

"How come?" he demanded.

"Get in the car, quick!" Sally ordered. "There's not a minute to lose. We'll go down that road there and stop at the first house."

As if hypnotized, her rescuer obeyed. He stopped in front of it. Ordering him to come with her, she went inside. The children were still alive and safe, thank heavens! With the rancher's help she freed them.

"I'm hungry," croaked Johnny.

"I'm thirsty, too" said Gary. "I want my mummy."

"You shall have your mummy," Sally promised.

Johnny could walk and she led him to the car. The rancher picked Gary up in his arms and followed.

"I'd sure like to know about all this," he ventured, as they were driving into Fort Centralia.

"First," said Sally, "get us to the police station.

Sally prayed that she would find Dan Fowler there.

At that instant, however, the ace G-man was groping through the shop of Tim Cody. He went into the living quarters, intent on just one thing—finding a pair of shoes. He found a closet, groped, switched on his flash. He saw two pair of shoes, conventional oxfords, one pair much used.

He picked them up, turned them over. Both were equally worn! That meant that when Tim Cody, was not masquerading as a blind man, he did not limp. For Fowler had noticed his shuffling, scraping gait, and how much more worn was the Western boot he wore on the foot of the crippled leg than the other. Tim Cody was two identities!

He put down the shoes, went back into the shop—and tripped against something soft and yielding. He flashed his light downward. The ray found the pale features of Larry Kendal. His head was bloody. There were dark stains on the floor. Fowler swallowed hard, fought to control himself, bent quickly.

As he did, he heard a rush behind him, a savage, wolflike snarl. The next instant he was struck by a hundred pounds of furry flesh. Tim Cody's Seeing Eye dog!

He felt hot breath and the dig of fangs as the animal sought to sink them into his throat. He fought off the beast, and went for his gun. The dog leaped again. Fowler felt the impact as he tried to straighten up. The berserk animal's teeth tore at his shirt, ripped his flesh.

He hated to kill a dog—but it was the dog's life or his. He fired. The jaws relaxed, causing the upper part of the animal's body to rock backward as another explosion echoed through the shop.

Dan Fowler lunged forward, this time closing in on human flesh. His hand gripped an arm. He twisted. Two shots plowed in the floor, and a gun clattered after them. A fist clipped him on the side of the head, dazing him. He shook himself, lashed out. He heard a moan, a falling body. Then there was silence.

Dan Fowler groped for a light switch. He turned it on.

Larry Kendal was still lying there. Fowler bent, felt his aide's skin. It was warm. Larry's heart was beating.

The dog's body shook in a final spasm of death.

Tim Cody, the gunsmith, was almost flat on the floor, his head propped up by a wall. He was breathing heavily. Fowler stepped forward and slipped manacles on the man's wrists.

"You rat," he said, wearily, and without passion. "You even taught your dog to kill."

He went to the telephone.

CHIEF of Police William Agee was the last person to enter the law offices of Arch Andrews. Already seated there were Andrews, presiding at his desk, Dixie Hogan, alias Madeline D'Arcy, looking ten years younger. Larry Kendal was there his head wound covered with bandages placed there by Dr. Phil Blakeley' skilled hands and Sally Vane, wearing a trim new powder-blue suit and a straw sailor which tilted down over her wide forehead. Dan Fowler now eyed Sally with great admiration.

Agee's face was flushed and his features were lifted by an almost boyish smile.

"All here, eh?" he exclaimed. "Well, I've good news for you. They just nailed Collins, alias Blue, trying to get across the Canadian border."

Fowler sighed.

"Well, that just about cleans up the case."

Agee looked at Andrews' desk, piled high with bundles of bills and negotiable securities.

Andrews caught his glance.

"There's nearly four million dollars there," the lawyer told him. "Some of the bonds have appreciated considerably since the war."

"More money than I've ever seen in my life!" Agee exclaimed.

"And probably more than you'll ever see again, you being an honest cop," Fowler said.

"There was a time when you weren't so sure," Agee reminded him with a grin.

"Right," admitted Fowler, "and that goes for Mr. Andrews and Mrs. D'Arcy, too. I had my doubts about them. In fact, the first one I suspected was Twoomey—until he said that no Westerner would have buried Boyd's torso in such a shallow grave, and would have put rocks on it. Collins rightfully came in for his share of suspicion, also."

"Have you found Boyd's head and hands?" Andrews asked.

"Buried in three different places," Kendal said. "Halloran, alias Cody, was thorough. He told us where to find them when he confessed."

"What else did he tell you?" Mrs. D'Arcy asked.

"His story parallels Dan's deductions in every way," Kendal told her. "Steve Halloran stepped too far beyond the California law. The heat went on him. He took the disguise of a blind gunsmith and came up here to see if he could find that stuff." KenDall indicated the pile of green paper on the desk.

"He had no luck. He's had some mechanical experience and was apt, so his business prospered. But his very nature made him find something dishonest to do. So while he was importuning Boyd to escape, and was tracing Mrs. D'Arcy, he enlisted Sheriff Twoomey and Deputy Collins in handling black market meat and running scotch. Collins never knew him as anyone except blind Tim Cody.

Twoomey did know he was living a dual role, but was too dumb to realize he was Steve Halloran.

"Boyd's escape was the signal for Halloran to go into action. After burglarizing Mrs. D'Arcy's home and curio shop so that he would know what was going on, he kidnaped her children, demanding her part of the map as ransom for them. When Boyd arrived, Cody—or Halloran—lured the fugitive to his shop on the pretext of showing him that part of the map he didn't have, and shot him with the thirty-eight which had been converted into a thirty-two through the use of the steel tube, or sleeve."

"That's why he was so willing to help us round up every thirty-two within miles," Agee interjected. "He thought we were just chasing our own tails. And he wanted to mislead us."

"Correct," said Fowler. "He was doing all right until he lured us to the precipice. He failed to kill us and got panicky. He was afraid Twoomey had been spotted—which he had been—and would talk. So he killed Twoomey. He didn't expect that the thirty-two tube would shatter. He didn't even know it was broken until he got back to his shop. After that he stole Andrews' thirty-two from our room, hoping we'd suspect Andrews.

"He had just returned from Spokane when Kendal came in to his place. He shot Kendal. He was packing in the dark, planning to dig up his loot and leave for Canada when I knocked. He concealed himself and the dog. You all know the rest of the story."

Mrs. D'Arcy reached over and patted Sally's hand.

"Thank you, my dear, for saving my children. I can never repay you. They've been asking for you all day."

"I'll come to see them before I go," Sally replied. "They're wonderful kids—the kind I'd like to have myself."

She shot a covert glance at Fowler.

Fowler was looking at Mrs. D'Arcy.

"Your share will be more than two million," he said. "I suppose some of it will go to give the boys a good education."

MRS. D'ARCY shook her head, and looked appealingly at Andrews. He nodded assent to her unspoken question. Color rose to her cheeks.

"After all," she said, "my late husband was in an—ah—irregular business. I would not want to touch such proceeds. After the Government is paid, I am going to divide the balance equally between the U.S.O., the Red Cross, and the National War Fund."

"But how will you provide for the boys?" protested Sally.

Mrs. D'Arcy looked again at Arch Andrews.

"Archie—Mr. Andrews—has been a very successful lawyer," she said, "and the curio shop is doing well. I think these will take care of all of us, after we're married."

Andrews cleared his throat.

"You must all come to the wedding. And Fowler, you'll be my best man."

Fowler shook his head. There was genuine regret in his expression.

"Sally, Larry and I would give anything to be there," he said, "but I'm afraid Uncle Sam has arranged another date for us—and it isn't social."

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FURTHER EXCITING EXPLOITS OF DAN FOWLER
IN

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Baird stepped away from the truck while I got down on one knee, and then the shooting began

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CHAPTER I

A Girl's Life Pays

THE hurricane had passed but we were still suffering the effects of it. The power lines were down—the power company had fought a game and winning fight for years against putting them underground where they belonged—and as a result most of the town had no current. The old-fashioned ice-box was at a premium, with the poor suckers who had bought electric ice boxes and ranges from the power company eating in restaurants and talking about it loudly and profanely.

And thieves were running wild.

There was nothing to stop them—that was the trouble. Most of the people out on the beach, and that was the richest neighborhood in the city, had moved in to the better hotels and left their houses either deserted or with a single caretaker. Trees had fallen across every power line in that district and knocked out even the street lights.

Some of the water mains had burst and had added to the flood that came along with the hurricane so that some built-up areas were flooded. Many streets were completely blocked with hurricane debris, and altogether that part of town was in a state.

And that was where the firm I worked for carried a lot of Pan-American insurance, including a good many burglary policies.

I was thinking of that while I was going through the paper, and it seemed there were two interesting articles on the front page. One especially interesting to me; and one to

George, our Florida native "conch" porter. Mine was serious, and his was written in a kidding way, but the reporter had been kidding on the square as far as George was concerned.

Mine read "BEACH HOMES ROBBED," with a sub-heading stating there had been a series of burglaries in the beach district. It then went on to list about twenty of them.

George's read "THE CEMETERY DEAD," with a sub-head that simply added, "DEAD DRUNK!"

The story with it told how the caretaker of the Gates Ajar Cemetery which was located near a sort of shack settlement of the "natives," just outside of town on the way to the Everglades, had discovered the cemetery office had been broken into and used as a flop-house by a bunch of drunks.

NOTHING was missing, the story said, the place was full of empty bottles, sandwich wrappings, and little odds and ends like that. The reporter who was by-lined as being named Dearing had made a good story of it, probably in an attempt to take the mind of the public away from real troubles.

George, the porter, didn't have that idea at all. He breathed heavily in my ear from where he was reading the paper over my shoulder, and his voice quavered when he spoke.

"That man's wrong, Mr. Grady" he said. "It says here that the people who fill a drunkard's grave in that there cemetery arise and join the party them folks in the office have. That ain't so. Them poor corpses get up 'cause they is mad about such goin's on, where they are restin'. I know—I've seen 'em."

"You saw what, George?" I asked.

"Well, maybe I didn't see it my own self, but I knows a man that done see it. He sees them dead people get right out of they graves and they is mad. They run right at him."

"The devil you say!"

"Yessir, Mr. Grady! My frien' he's fixing to shoot a little craps and he goes out. He aims to go to the barber shop—they's a feller named Josiah Meekins runs a barber shop out that away and he's got hisself a li'l game in the back room. My frien' goes out to see if he can make a pass or two and he goes by the cemetery. And some of them dead people run at him and they run him right back in his own house. Yessir! That boy shore don' shoot no craps that night."

"When was all this?" I asked.

"Night before last. And my frien' say he is through with dice, Mr. Grady. Yessir!"

I said I wished I'd been scared away from dice, cards, the horses, and the like when I was fourteen, and that if I had been I no doubt would be both rich and respected.

George went back to his mop and bucket and I forgot about it . . .

The only cheering thing about the robberies was that I knew one of the robbers. A lad named Simmy Williams, a local boy who had graduated into fairly big time. He had started small and learned his trade as all good workmen should, and he had gone to reform school a couple of times while doing it.

That was a sort of apprenticeship for him. All he had done was break into a few service stations and grocery stores and pick up whatever he found that was loose.

Then he grew up and extended his field of operations. This time specializing in hardware and sporting goods stores, where he could collect things that had value in the hock shops. The judge gave him five years at this stage of his career and he did three of it.

When he got out that time he thought he knew his job. He went first-class, hitting the jewelry stores and the furriers, and he kept away from the local hock shops as though the owners had leprosy. It was certain that he was sending his stuff North, to some fence up there, but not a single thing was ever recovered.

They caught him when he forgot to disconnect the burglar alarm at Dixon's, one of the leading jewelry stores in town. He got a ten spot for that but was paroled in four years—our parole board being in the habit of doing funny things like that.

And now he was out and working at his trade again.

He had left fingerprints on two of the twenty jobs that I figured he had been in, and there was no question about it. They checked right with the local files, with the prison records at Raiford, and with the F.B.I. It was just a question of picking Simmy up, breaking him down to learn who had been on the jobs with him, and then sending him away.

With his record the chances are he would be away for a good long time, too. Even our odd parole board couldn't very well free a man serving his third felony conviction for breaking and entering.

SO THE only trick was to put the finger on Simmy, but it had turned out to be the kind of trick that can't be done with

mirrors. Simmy was in town but nobody had seen him—or at least that's what the stoolies told the cops.

Mine were telling me the same thing.

It was like that when John Baird, a detective-lieutenant working Homicide, dropped in.

Baird was sourer than ever and he never was a cheerful soul. He sat down, glowered at me, and bit the end of a cigar with teeth that should have been on a horse. They were that big and yellow.

"You hear the radio?" he said.

"Not since last night," I said.

"Another three places kicked in. All out on the beach."

"We've probably got at least two of them covered," I said. "There's no doubt I'll be hearing about it from the boss."

"You fellas got it easy," Baird grouched. "I hear about it from about a dozen bosses in the Department, and then I hear about it from the Commission, and then I read about it in the paper. You're lucky to hear it just from one."

I said it got monotonous, though, to hear it all day long. And asked what the devil breakings and enterings had to do with him.

He scowled at his cigar which must have been one he had bought for himself. Nobody, trying to get along with a policeman would have handed out a thing like that. It was both smelling and burning like a piece of Fourth of July punk.

"One of the places they took was old man Robinson's," he said. "There was nobody but a girl there—a girl named Maggie Christy. Margaret Christy, I guess it should be. Old man Robinson took himself and family up north, as soon as he heard we were going to have a storm. Well, the thieves went in through a window and they must have worked it with too much noise, because they work this Maggie Christy. We find her in the hall between the pantry and the dining room with her head caved in."

"Dead?"

"As mutton."

"Who found her?"

"Her boy friend. When he dropped in to see her this morning."

"I had Simmy Williams picked as heading these jobs," I said. "This don't sound like Simmy. He never took life before."

"There's always a first time," Baird said. "You got that Robinson account, Sam?"

"We have," I said and wished we hadn't.

"Okay!" Baird said. "Then maybe I'll be seeing you."

Which was just his way of saying he expecter me to hand over any dope I got on either Simmy Williams or the Robinson theft.

CHAPTER II

Horse Player

SIMMY WILLIAMS was a horse player and I knew it. I'd known him between his first and second hitch at Raiford. He was hotter than a pistol and certainly knew it, so there wasn't a chance in the world of him showing up at the track in person, or for that matter going into one of the horse parlors.

But there was a good chance of him phoning in a bet or two, now and then, and that's what I started to work on.

I wasn't worried about the boys holding out the dope on me, either. Taking them one and all I'd spent money with them—not only had spent it but was spending it. They would have protected Simmy, at least to a certain extent, as long as he was just wanted for a little thieving and minor things like that, but it takes a pretty hard man to condone the murder of a girl.

And particularly that kind of a murder—a girl sapped out just because she happened to get in somebody's way.

The poor Christy gal had probably just heard some suspicious noise and got up to investigate—she had been in her nightie when found. Her getting killed because she was looking after the house, which she was being paid to do, put every hand against the killer.

And while it was hard for me to believe that Simmy was the man, Baird could be right. Simmy might have hit her either in panic or because she recognized him. She had been a local girl, and Simmy was a local boy.

I made the rounds and explained this thought to the bookies and I believed them when they said they hadn't heard from Simmy, or about Simmy, for a year or more.

And then I hit Juan Gomez's stand. Juan, a Cuban, had a cleaning and pressing shop and he actually cleaned and pressed. He even had a Hoffman press in the front of his store with a presser working away at the gadget, just to prove he was on the up and up.

His presser happened to be Mike Cooley, who had been a jock some twenty years back

until the commission caught up with him and suspended him. Mike had put in time in half a dozen State pens during the twenty years following but he was a presser just the same.

I wandered in and didn't go through to the back room as usual. Juan grinned at me and asked me if I was fool enough to be bringing him a little honest business in the cleaning and pressing line.

"I'm looking for Simmy Williams, Juan," I said.

Juan Gomez was short and sort of pear-shaped, and he showed me his middle-age spread by turning around and hiking up his coat tails.

"I haven't got Simmy Williams in my pants pockets," he said.

"Now, now!" I said. "I'm not a track cop. You see Simmy lately?"

"I have not. Mike, has Simmy Williams been in while I was out? Like to the bank or something?"

"He has not," Cooley said. "He owes me ten bucks since he was in town the last time. After I loan it to him he tips over some joint a man named Larkin owns and he makes a good score. But does he pay me my sawbuck? He does not. He comes in here, unless he's got that ten for me, and I'll heave this press at him. He'll either pay me or pay the doctor."

I put this down as wishful thinking, because the press weighed at least seven hundred pounds, besides being bolted down to the floor, and Mike Cooley not weighing more than a hundred and thirty with his pockets full of diving shoes.

I made it low so that Cooley couldn't hear.

"Let's put it a different way, Juan," I said. "Has he maybe phoned in a bet or two?"

"I don't tell my business to people," Juan said.

"He killed a girl last night, Juan. Or he was on a job where the girl was killed, if that's any better. Should you tell your business or not?"

"Whooey," said the Cuban. "A life-taker now, is it. Now I know I won't tell my business."

"He caved the girl's head in, Juan," I said. "Or somebody with him did. It's one and the same thing."

HE SPREAD his hands palms up.

"And I've got my own girls—that's what you are going to tell me next," he said. "So okay! What I tell you will not help. Simmy Williams phones in bets, yes. Just sometimes, not every day. Simmy was always a boy that followed a couple horses and bet 'em when the track is right. He is now playing Suzanne, Oh Dear, and Dark Prince. He plays Dark Prince to win, always, and he plays Suzanne and Oh Dear across the board. He always plays three notes on Dark Prince and a hundred across the board on Suzanne and Oh Dear. Now do I help?"

"You've started, Juan. Where does he phone from?"

"That I do not know. Maybe from a drug-store. Maybe from a bar. Maybe from a store. Maybe from a phone where he is living."

"Hiding, you mean."

Juan shrugged.

"Don't he ever win?"

Juan showed me his palms again. "This is where I can not tell you. He wins, yes. Never yet on Dark Prince, but Suzanne and Oh Dear finish in the money once in a while. Then I meet him and we straighten out. He always owes me money, but after his horse comes in it is never so much. I meet him and he pays me, but only when he makes a score."

"Where d'ya meet him?" I asked.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, Sam. I never know. He telephones. He says drive out this place or that place and keep moving. I drive out and keep moving. He either runs me into the curb with his car or he flags me down. I tell him what he is behind. He pays me. I drive away."

"How often does this happen?"

"Three times—four times. Simmy has been in town for maybe one month before the storm. He is hot—I know it, but I cannot turn him in. Not even now, if I knew where he lived."

"Why not, Juan?" I asked.

I got a look at his hands again while he said:

"And I've got girls, like you were going to tell me. Suppose Simmy has friends? Suppose my girls get their faces bashed in? Not by Simmy—Simmy is not that way. But by his friends. They are rough people, Sam. That I know."

"How do you know?" I urged.

He shrugged. "I see them with Simmy, when Simmy pays me his bets. They are rough people."

"Can you describe them?"

"It was very dark, Sam. I can not."

That was all I could get from him and that was more than I expected. He wasn't telling me all he knew, of course, but that was because he was afraid to talk too much. And thinking about him having a family I

didn't blame him too much.

Simmy was tough enough, even though I didn't think he was the kind who would kill a girl, but there was no telling just who he had picked up with.

Or rather, there was. He had picked up with somebody who didn't draw the line at killing, whether it was a girl or not.

On the way back to the Pan-American office I had a brainstorm and drove to the police station instead. I found John Baird in his office, with his feet on the desk and another one of his trick fusees in his face.

"I've got an idea," I said.

"I don't believe it," he said.

Then I gave it to him, knowing it didn't amount to much but knowing the police had enough men to put on the detail the idea would need.

It was simple enough—so simple that even Baird could catch the thought. It was just that Simmy, and whoever was working with him had knocked off a lot of places and had to do something with the loot.

THEY had stripped twenty or more houses of just about everything but the furniture—everything that was of any value—and none of the stuff had turned up in the local markets as far as it could be found out. That meant they were either shipping out the spoils or storing them, and I thought either could maybe be traced.

"Just about everything in this town is rented through agents," I said. "Check them, just for a start."

Baird looked bored and said: "We have. We've checked every rental made in the last three months. If the renters didn't have references, we looked 'em up and looked 'em over."

"And check the Express Company on what goes out."

Baird took his feet from his desk.

"Why, that's really a thought," he said. "The only thing, it'll take half my department to do it."

"They aren't doing much else, are they?"

"If you mean they're not finding Simmy Williams, they're not. The Express Company can tell us what are sure to be legitimate shipments, certainly. Like from the stores and places like that. All we'd have to watch for is odd lots and from strangers in town. Sam, you might have something there."

I said I certainly hoped I did and went on to the office. And to a bawling out from Sprague, the head of the claim adjusting department, who seemed to think that my not finding Simmy was just being done to spite him.

I didn't blame Sprague too much at that. He was paying out company money on the burglaries with both hands. I had no doubt but that the head office was raising Cain with him in turn.

I let him talk and just sent George, the porter, out for the racing sheets. Both scratch and form.

CHAPTER III

Gates Ajar

LOOKING 'em over I could see why Simmy Williams had gone for Suzanne, Oh Dear, and Dark Prince. On form Dark Prince was due, and he had always gone to the post with a nice price on him. Suzanne and Oh Dear were both steady performers and did as well as could be expected. Neither were good horses, but they wer n't running against top competition, either, so they about broke even.

I didn't bet any of them, but I began to watch them.

Dark Prince ran two days after that and finished just out of the money. Suzanne ran the day after that and took show money but she only paid three-sixty on it and that wasn't enough to count.

But Oh Dear ran the fourth day and took place, and she paid seven-eighty and four-sixty, which made anybody playing her a hundred across the board a three-hundred-odd-buck winner.

I had a notion that would get Simmy out of his hole, and I was parked beyond Juan Gomez's cleaning and pressing place from five o'clock on. But I got no action until about an hour after it had turned dark—about eight o'clock with the normal time we're back on.

Gomez was driving a two-tone '41 Buick, which made him an easy lad to tag—and tag him I did. A block or more behind him. He hit up toward Fort Gracey and I dropped back and let a couple of cars get between us. Then he turned left, just before he hit the city limits.

He was apparently following directions because he went two blocks over and cut back toward the city for four, before swinging left again.

I had a good notion that we had passed Simmy Williams, probably sitting in a parked car along our route, but I carefully kept from watching cars along the curb. There was enough chance as it was of Simmy spotting me.

Then Juan Gomez came to Seventy-sixth Street and Fourth Avenue and went once around the block and parked.

I parked almost a block in front of him.

Juan waited another ten minutes and took another circle around. That section is thinly settled and I could keep him in sight most of the time from where I stayed quietly in a patch of shadow. Headlights, at night like that, are almost as easy to follow as the car itself in daylight.

Then I saw him pull into the curb, just across the block from me.

I could have driven around and it might have been better if I had. But I was alone, and if I had to shoot I didn't want to try and do that and drive the car at one and the same time. It's one of the kind of things that don't pay off. You can make a noise with the gun, but making noise is the best you can do. The innocent bystander is in much more danger than the target you're trying for.

So I slid out of the car and eased across the lot. And got within about fifty feet of Juan before he started to pull away from the curb.

He had left two men standing there and they worked in masterly fashion. They separated, and I didn't know which one to take. But I decided on the one walking away from town and almost ran over to cut him off.

It was then he saw me and started shooting, standing still and laying them in at me and I wasn't more than thirty feet from him. And there was nothing I could do but shoot back. I couldn't run fast enough to get out of range, and I couldn't depend on him to keep missing me.

He wasn't a good shooter and I was. Or maybe I was just lucky, because he wobbled on my first shot and went down on my second. And he went down all spraddled out and I knew it was Katy bar the door.

The other man was a block away by that time and going strong, so I didn't even try to chase him. If he hadn't a car parked near there he could still either dodge me or outrun me, and there was even a chance that he might lay doggo along the sidewalk and pot me as I went by.

I didn't want any part of him, the way things had worked out.

I WENT over to the man I had downed and turned a flash in his face, after kicking the gun he still held in his hand out of it and to the side of the walk. I had never seen him before in my life, and about the time I discovered that a bunch of the citizens around there located where the gunfire had come from and started to gather around.

Then a prowl car came along and I went down to the station. They wanted pictures, diagrams, my life history, the dead man's gun, and statements from all the witnesses, these last totally lacking.

I got to the station about half-past ten, and found Baird waiting for me.

Baird cleared me, because after all I had given him a man who was almost certainly a pal of Simmy Williams. Of course I'd given him the man dead and unable to talk, and this galled him.

"You shouldn't have shot him, Sam, you really shouldn't have," he said seriously. "If we'd got him alive we'd have Simmy and the rest of 'em in an hour."

"I suppose I should have stood there and let him pop away at me,' I said.

"There must have been some other way, Sam."

"Sure there was. I could have beaned him with a rock, like David did Goliath."

He looked puzzled. "I don't place that one," he said. "David who? Was that a local case, maybe?"

I told him that it was out of town, but that it had caused quite a lot of commotion at the time it happened.

"When you send out this fella's prints you may get a line on who he played around with," I said then. "It's just about a cinch that Simmy picked him up somewhere up North, and imported him for these thefts. Maybe Simmy brought down a crew."

"Who were they meeting, Sam? And how did you get a line on it?"

I said I couldn't turn in my source of information and I held to it, though I thought for a while that Baird was going to put me in the pokey charged with obstructing justice or some such charge. He had a notion I'd got the dope from some stoolie and I was satisfied to let him think that.

I thought I'd put Juan Gomez far enough in the middle the way it was, and as soon as I got out of the station I gave him a ring and told him so.

"The best thing you can do, Juan," I said, "is take the wife and kids and a vaca-

tion, all at the same time. Until this thing tops off. Because you and the family can't keep a police guard on yourselves and depend on twenty-four-hour protection."

"And my business?" Juan said, running it up until "business" was almost a scream in my ear.

"Let Mike Cooley take care of the front and let the syndicate put somebody in back to handle the book," I told him. "Listen! You can't take that book to the grave with you."

He said he thought I might be right and called me some names in Spanish, for putting him on that spot.

"Just one question, Juan," I said, when he stopped for breath. "When you met Simmy, wasn't it usually pretty close to where you met him tonight? I mean fairly close to that same neighborhood."

He admitted it was and I hung up and went back to the station after Baird.

For one thing, I didn't know exactly what I was likely to run into, and for another, graveyards scare me at night. And I was planning on scouting the lay-out at the Gates Ajar. . . .

IT WAS a black night, with the moon just a sliver in the sky and with clouds scudding past that and what few stars were in sight. Just a swell night not to go graveyarding, but graveyarding we went.

The Gates Ajar Cemetery was just about in the center of the various places Juan Gomez had met Simmy, to adjust their horse bets, and I'd remembered what George, our porter, had had to say about the dead people rising from their graves and running stray men away.

Not that it takes much to run a conch away from a graveyard.

It was an old cemetery, with the bulk of it cut up into family plots. Shantytown had moved toward it, slowly and gradually, but the people apparently didn't want to be nearer to it than a couple of blocks away. It was fenced with a high iron arrangement, all fretted and supposedly decorative, but it was both a style that suited the Nineties and a tough problem to get over.

Baird and I made it by propping planks and an empty wooden box we found in a vacant lot next to it against a supporting iron post. We didn't want to go in through the gate, just on the possibility of a lookout being stationed there.

I had a general idea of the route George's crap-shooting friend must have followed to get to the barber shop where the game had been, and so we headed for that section of the place. Most of the stones were so weathered they shone very little in what poor light we had, but occasionally we would pass something really fancy that stood out. Mausoleums or crypts or vaults or whatever they're called—little stone houses with shelves along the side for coffins. Sometimes just an entrance leading down to one of these things, although the entrance was always fancy enough in its own right.

It was the sort of thing that was popular when the cemetery was really the place to park the body.

We had passed twenty or more of these things and were almost at the fence running by the east side of the place when we heard the truck. And I almost broke a leg falling over Baird, while trying to hide behind the same tombstone he picked for shelter.

By the time I found one of my own and got straightened out, the truck was almost on us. It trundled by so close we could read "CITY TRANSFER" painted on its side.

"There's no City Transfer Company in town," I heard Baird mumble.

"Who says there ain't," I said. "There is, and it's Simmy's. We got here just in time. They're moving out tonight."

"That shooting's made 'em pull the pin," Baird said.

Then we got another shock. A man came strolling past us, coming from the direction of the main gate, and he passed within ten feet of us. If he hadn't been scuffing his big feet in the gravel, as though his shoes were two sizes too big for him, he'd have heard us for sure.

And all he carried under his arm was a sawed off shotgun. The clouds left the moon in the open for a moment and we could see the ugly-looking thing. He went by.

"I should of brought a squad," Baird said. "Just two of us, and how good do I know you are with a gun. And them mechanized with shotguns."

"I was fair enough with a gun earlier this evening," I said. "I was too good, according to you."

I was trying to pass off the whole thing, but I doubt if I made much of a job of it. Seeing that scatter-gun had me shivering like zero weather. I don't suppose Baird felt a great deal better, either, but his voice sounded all right when he gave us the go-ahead.

"Let's get moving," he said. "If we can get 'em bunched it'll be better than taking

em one at a time. I wish I knew how many of them there is."

I said that was something I had no idea of and we started moving toward where the truck had stopped, maybe a hundred and fifty yards from there. It had gone in without lights in spite of the darkness, but we could faintly see a gleam from its white body.

CHAPTER IV

Out of the Tomb

BAIRD was a dilly. I found out afterward that he had been a scout and sniper in World War I. He went around those tombstones with no more noise than a ghost is supposed to make, and we ended not ten yards from the front of the truck and between it and the fence. And from there we could see what was going on.

One of those underground vaults was open and four men were loading the truck from it. They had the back of it open and a runway leading from that to the ground, and they were as busy as little beavers, trotting from the vault to the truck and back again. They were doing the actual loading in the dark, but we could see a faint shine from inside the vault—about as much light as a candle in a tin can would throw out.

"Ready?" Baird asked, and I tried to say I was and must have managed to make the kind of a noise he took as a yes.

None of the four truck loaders had the shotgun in sight and I kept wondering if the man who had had it was doing guard duty and maybe was behind me, with the thing centered in my back.

Baird stood up with his gun out and ready and went ahead, keeping the truck between him and the loaders. I tagged along.

And then—heaven be praised—the clouds left the moon alone for a moment and we had a little light for the pay-off.

Baird eased along his side of the truck and I eased along mine. We had separated to make two different targets. And then he must have stepped away from the truck, as we had planned, because I heard him, nice and clearly and sharply.

"Hold it, boys!"

I went to the side about ten feet, so that I wouldn't have the truck between me and the customers and went down on one knee, so that I would have so far to fall if one of the customers decided to shoot at me.

But they started shooting at Baird instead.

From Baird's position one of the boys was about half-way behind another, and this lad got a gun out of his right hip pocket. He was only about twenty feet from me and I shot him through just about where he had taken the gun from. Just as the gun kicked back in my hand I saw that the barrel of it was lined on the seat of his pants.

He sat down on where I'd shot him and I decided I'd probably broken his hip.

That started everything. One fellow whirled and started to run and I shot again, aiming at knee level. And I was lucky again because he sprawled ahead on his face and started screaming at the top of his voice.

Then both Baird and the two men still on their feet started in, and Baird worked through four shells in his gun so fast the sound they made almost blurred. I know I only managed to shot once during his fusillade, while one of the customers got one shot back at him and the other got two. And the only way I knew the last man shot twice was because I saw his gun, after the thing was over.

Baird was still standing, but tottery on his feet, and the two boys were down.

And then out of the vault came the man with the shotgun!

Baird had two shells left in his gun and I had three, and neither of us did any foolishness like shooting low. The shotgun man went falling back in the vault, shot five times through the middle.

I stuffed fresh shells in my gun and waited for Baird to fall down. But he managed to stagger over and prop himself against the truck and tell me to get to a phone and call both the wagon and an ambulance or two.

He said he could hold things down until I got back.

The second man I'd shot—the one I had taken through a shin—was Simmy Williams. And Simmy was one of the most talkative men I ever saw, after the police surgeon told him he'd give him no morphine unless he gave and gave out right.

His crew was a pick-up bunch from New York, all with records, and half of them hotter than the depot stove.

THE one I'd shot on the street, earlier, had been dead when he hit the sidewalk. So was the shotgun man who came out of

the vault, and the two who shot it out with Baird.

The shot I'd taken at one of the last had centered him all right. I shoot a .44 Special and Baird shot a .38, and the hole my slug made was easily identified. But my slug hadn't been needed. Baird had already got the lug through the wishbone and through the neck. The other one had taken two of Baird's slugs through the middle, and Baird apologized for the poor shooting, explaining that he had been shot through the shoulder at the time, and that the shock had thrown him off his mark.

I thought he hadn't done bad at all.

The tough who had fallen back down the vault was a wreck. He was just shot to pieces. We had hit him from both in front and from the side, and he was scattered all around inside his clothes.

The guy I had plugged in the pistol pocket was more outraged than injured. I'd thought I'd busted his hip but all I had hit was fat.

Between what was in the vault and what was in the truck, the cops found the bulk of the stuff that had been stolen during the hurricane thefts. And after Baird had his shoulder patched and we had listened to Simmy Williams tell all, we had a line on as pretty a little theft set-up as ever there was.

And all Simmy's idea. He even bragged about it.

[*Turn page*]

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REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.
PROCESS
STAR IS MADE by a secret process that produces a blade so tough it's *super-keen* and *longer-lasting*, too. So *uniform* you can count on a snappy shave, a happy face—every time!...*Star Division, American Safety Razor Corp., Brooklyn 1, N. Y.*

It had started in New York, three or four months before the hurricane season was due. Simmy had scouted around and found a bunch of congenial type thugs and put his proposition to them.

They had gone for it like a kitten goes for cream.

His idea was to wait for the first big storm and move right in. He had lived in our town most of his life and knew exactly what would happen when the hurricane struck. He had known the power would go, over at least a good part of the town, and knew the cops would be plenty busy with assorted rescue work and not have the time to do any proper policing. And that they would have nice dark houses to rob and nice dark streets to travel back and forth on with their loot.

The hide-out was Simmy's brain-storm and he was properly proud of it. He had known that the Gates Ajar was old and little used and that the natives who lived near shunned it like poison. He had even known the caretaker went home each night and that they would have the place to themselves. All he had to do was pick a nice underground vault that was set well away from the main traveled paths, break it open, and there he was.

His pals were not known in town and so they could live in hotels—and did—meeting at the cemetery in time to start the night's labor. But Simmy was known, so he just camped out in the vault, with the boys bringing him sandwiches and beer when they gathered before going to work.

They had got drunk, once, and put on a party in the caretaker's office, but Simmy said he had been against the party right along. He said he told the boys the party would make nothing but trouble and he got a sort of I-told-you-so look on his face when I told him that reading about the party was what had made me suspicious of the graveyard in the first place.

That and because they'd chased a crap shooter away from the cemetery one night.

Simmy explained the last and took no blame for it. He said the fellow had been too close, that if he had come any closer he could have seen them carrying a load of stolen stuff down into the vault. So they had to chase him. And I heard about it from George, our porter at the office.

Both Simmy and the lug I'd shot in the pants swore that one of the dead men had killed the Christy girl, and after Baird had checked all the records it seemed likely this was the truth. The killer, or the man both Simmy and my victim swore was the killer, had a record that ran to way back as a strong-arm expert and as being half crazy as well.

ACCORDING to Simmy the girl had come out from her bedroom and run into this thug. And when she screamed he conked her with a gun-barrel.

He was the bird who had come out of the vault with the shotgun and there was hardly enough left of him to bury, much less enough to try for murder.

But the court made up for it with Simmy and his pal. Each got twenty to life, for armed robbery and complicity in murder, before and after the fact.

And I gave George, the porter, credit for the whole thing.

"George," I said, "the next time you hear of any ghosts walking, you tell me. For sure now. If you hear or see any of them you let me know."

"Mr. Grady," George said, "I maybe might hear of 'em but that's all. I ain't goin' to hear 'em, not ever. Nossir! And I ain't goin' to see 'em, neither. Not George! If I think I'm goin' to see 'em or hear 'em, I'm jus' takin' off the other way, and a ghost will have to be fast on his feet to catch up with me. I'm jus' keeping away f'om that there graveyard."

And when I thought of how I'd crawled around those tombstones and how a crazy lug with a shotgun had come out of the ground at Baird and me, I didn't know as I blamed him.

In fact, I figured I'd stay away from the graveyard right along with George.

●

DEATH STALKS THROUGH THE GLOOM IN

THE MONDAY MURDER

A Baffling Complete Mystery Novelet

By WAYLAND RICE

NEXT ISSUE

A Department for Cipher Solvers By M. K. DIRIGO

CONTINUING with our little diversion from heavy analysis, we offer this month an old time classic of a message that appeared many years ago, entitled "A Curious Letter."

You will notice that the words make no sense at all. You might be tempted to read them by some geometric form or route. The spaces between the words will puzzle you. Some are small, some are large.

If you have ever solved a "NULL" cipher, the solution of which requires the OMISSION of certain letters, then you might easily be misled with this message. For you might fall into the trap of trying to ADD words in the vacant spaces.

You remember, in last issue's example, it was necessary to ADD the letter "E" seventeen times before it made any sense. Furthermore, the spaces where these "E's" were to be added were not indicated. You had to experiment and find the right spaces.

An experienced cryptographer is already accustomed to making such, and a great many other mental experiments, before he hits on the right track of a solution.

Believe it or not, that is all you have to do, to solve this month's "Curious Letter,"—make some mental experiments. Pencil and paper are not necessary.

Between the Lines

You have heard the expression "I read between the lines," which indicates a hidden meaning.

If you will study the letter, and READ BETWEEN THE LINES, you will solve the puzzle.

Don't look at the answer, which is at the end of this department, in upside-down writing. Give yourself a treat first and really try to solve it mentally. Here it is:

FRIENDS SIR, FRIENDS,
STAND YOUR
I BEARING DISPOSITION;
A MAN THE WORLD
IS
CONTEMPT,
WHILST THE
RIDICULE
AMBITIOUS ARE.

If you solve this without peeking, we know you enjoyed it. The practical value of messages of this kind is that it keeps you alert and observant, which is such an asset to a good cryptographer!

Importance of Codes

Turning your attention now to a more serious phase of ciphers, we quote from Walter Winchell—June 6, 1944:

> Here is a sidelight on the dirty business aspect of the last Peace Conference which is little known.
>
> Capt. H. O. Yardley (Chief of U. S. Military Intelligence, secret decoding and cipher bureau) revealed that he had deciphered a telegram which reported an entente plot to assassinate President Wilson, either by administering a slow poison or giving him influenza via ice—Capt. Yardley added in his own italics: *There are these undeniable facts: President Wilson's first sign of illness occurred while he was in Paris, and he was soon to die a lingering death.*

This is just one example of the real importance of codes and ciphers.

Another interesting story is told by Kurt Singer, in Chapter XXII of his new book, "Spies and Traitors of World War II," of how America's Code fell into Germany's hands.

FROM OUR MAILBAG

Van Magonigle, of Miami Beach, Fla., writes: "I have a suggestion to make. Why not have a 'Cipher Club' in which members can make up their own codes and send them in. You could publish the five best each issue. Also the members that send in correct solutions should have their names published."

Let us hear what other readers have to say about Mr. Magonigle's suggestion regarding a club. We do publish lists of correct solvers from time to time.

Joseph A. Laliberte of Providence, R. I., reports: "I solved your cryptograms in the last issue in three and a half hours—of which two hours were spent on the last one!"

Must have been a sticker for you, Mr. Laliberte!

Earle G. Sloane of Grand Marsh, Wis., asks whether he can obtain our list of pattern words in complete form. We are sorry this is not possible at the present time, as the only publication of these pattern words is in G-MEN DETECTIVE in serial form.

R. L. Hoisington, Palo Alto, Cal., says:

"Solving all ciphers I find in your department has become one of my first interests. Your department affords a pleasure that sticks as a memory."

Thank you! And thanks to all the others who have written in.

We'll quote from more letters in a coming number.

Answers to Cryptograms in February Issue

No. 354:

There was a young German named Stein
Who was secretly setting a mine
The fuse wouldn't work
So he gave it a jerk
And they found his watch on the Rhine.

No. 355: The miser grows rich by seeming poor—the extravagant man grows poor by seeming rich.

No. 356: Men in society, notwithstanding the diversity of their fortunes, depend the one upon the other.

No. 357: Death never comes too soon, if necessary in defense of the liberties of our country.

No. 358: Carnivorous mammal of the family Canidae is the genus homo's most loyal compeer.

(In plain language: ***A man's best friend is his dog.***)

HANDY LIST OF PATTERN WORDS

We continue our list of pattern words with an installment of eight-letter words which fall into the patterns 16-28 to 16-78 and 17-23 to 17-38. More than one letter is repeated twice in each one of these pattern words. Thus, 16-28 indicates that the first and sixth letters of the word are the same, and the second and eighth letters of the word are likewise the same.

A knowledge of pattern words—words in which there are repeated letters—is invaluable to cryptographers. The list to which we are constantly adding is the best and most complete list ever compiled.

INDEX 16-28

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OMnifOrM.
REchaRgE, REcouRsE, REsouRcE.
TRadiToR, TRibuTeR.

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OvErcOmE, OvErdOnE, OvErdOsE, OvErtOnE.
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ConDuCeD, CovErClE.
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FebrIFIc.
IdenTITy, ImpoNINg.
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LOOm-gaLe.
NEEdliNg.

[*Turn to page 58*]

TRY TO SOLVE THESE FIVE NEW CRYPTOGRAMS

AGAIN we bring you five new cryptograms of exceptional interest. These have been carefully planned to test your mettle, taking into consideration all you have learned if you have been a steady reader of this department. For beginners, our first cryptogram this month is one of those amusing limericks, and we give you several hints to start you off.

1. That one-letter word isn't fooling anybody.
2. That same one-letter word will give you entries to LI, LQC and LGN and help you solve these words.
3. You will find "FINAL S" appearing 5 times as a final and 6 times as an INITIAL.
4. "E" is not the highest frequency letter here, though very close to it, but the 7 highest frequency letters in this limerick—I L C B G V S—when slightly rearranged, are also the 7 highest frequency letters in the alphabet.
5. A word of caution—this is just a trifle more difficult than the usual run of limericks. So tackle it carefully!

The four following cryptograms are more advanced than the limerick—but you should be able to solve them if you have followed this department. In No. 360 note that it starts with two two-letter words, each ending with the same letter. No. 361 is a two-line verse promoting thrift. No. 362 is a quotation, with the author's name in brackets at the end. And No. 363 is one of those famous pedantic proverbs which are great fun. After you decipher it, simplify the language and you will have a well-known proverb.

Please send all your solutions in. They will be acknowledged in this department from time to time. A postcard will do as well as a sealed letter. Address all communications to The Black Chamber, % G-MEN DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Thank you!

No. 359. *A Limerick for Beginners*

ITV YSKQVFCB BLI VG L WLGIQX BMCRO
LGN TLIKMCN TSIM CDWQCBBSVGB WLSGCN
IMC YSRZYLSN'B BIEGIB
LGN FVIM BLSN LI VGKC
VEQ QCRLISVGB LQC HVSGH IV FC BIQLSGCN

No. 360. *Don't Burn Your Fingers*

JC KC ULTD JOD PCBTDV JYTD JOD
HCYIJDK NODIJBMJI CMJ CE JOD
ELHD RLJO JOD NYJIFYR

No. 361. *Mister—Can You Spare A Dime?*

OD LI ICRLBZ JOD IDDKI CE ICHHCR
ROC IFDBKI JCKYV ROYJ OD DYHBI
JCPCHHCR

No. 362. *Where Folly Is Jolly*

JODHD LI PCHD JHMD OYFFLBDII LB
JOD ECUUV CE UCQD JOYB LB YUU JOD
RLIKCP CE FOLUCICFOV (ELDUKLBZ)

No. 363. *A Pedantic Proverb*

JOD FCULNV CE ADLBZ IYFLDBJ LI
LBWMKLNLCMI RODHD JOD CFFCILJD
NCBKLJLCB NCBEDHI EDULNLJV

First solve the cryptogram. Then convert it into plain language.

OCCasiOn.
RE-EmbaRk, RE-ExpoRt.

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ACiCulAe, ACiCulAr, AUgUriAl, AUgUstAn, AUtUmnAl.
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FIsh-wIFe.
INsomNIa.
KInglIKe.
LImekILn.
NAuseANt, NEsciENt, NIcotINe.
RE-covERs, REcovERs, REcovERy, REfinERy, RIcebIRd, ROgatORy.
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PEricoPE.
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MiSforMS.
NeGatiNG, NuTrieNT.
OvErshOE.
ReMifoRM.
UnLawfUL.
WiLdfoWL.

Answer to "A Curious Letter"

"SIR, BETWEEN FRIENDS, I UNDERSTAND YOUR OVERBEARING DISPOSITION; A MAN EVEN WITH THE WORLD IS ABOVE CONTEMPT, WHILST THE AMBITIOUS ARE BENEATH RIDICULE."

Read Our Companion Detective Magazines

DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE
THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE
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THRILLING DETECTIVE
BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE
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CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE
*F-N TEST?
*The Famous Finger Nail Test
1 "It's F-N, the test for men!" Scratch your head—if you find dryness or loose dandruff you need Wildroot Cream-Oil. Buy the large economy size.
YOUR HAIR CAN LOOK LIKE THIS WITH NEW
WILDROOT CREAM-OIL
2 Only a little Wildroot Cream-Oil can do a big job for your hair. Keeps your hair well groomed all day long without a trace of that greasy, plastered down look! Your hair looks good and feels good too!
CREAM-OIL CHARLIE SAYS: "IT CONTAINS LANOLIN!"
3 Get Wildroot Cream-Oil from your barber or drug counter and...Tune in the Woody Herman Show Saturdays 8 P. M. (EST) A B C (Blue) Network. 183 stations.
WILDROOT
CREAM-OIL
LANOLIN

As Tolliver picked up the strand of wire, the shadow swept close to him

THE BARON ADVANCES UNDER FIRE

By CURTISS T. GARDNER

Bill "Baron Munchausen" Tolliver meets double trouble in the strange crime of a man who has been murdered—twice!

BILL "Baron Munchausen" Tolliver pushed aside his empty coffee cup. Through the window beyond the cramped little booth in the Live-and-Let-Live Lunchroom where he and "Baldy" Leigh were sitting, his sharp black eyes watched Imperial Casualty's plump, blonde office girl emerge from the side entrance of the building opposite and start across the street.

"Ten minutes to five," he remarked to Baldy slyly. "Lucky guys like you ready to call it a day. But me—" he laid a shiny new quarter on the table edge "—two bits says I'll get myself tagged within sixty more seconds."

"It's a bet," Baldy said promptly. "You've

got a complex about working evenings, Baron, but this time you're all wet." He was starting to pick up the quarter as the girl opened the lunchroom door.

"Mr. Tolliver," she called, "Mr. Mehary wants you."

The Baron's face registered mock surprise. "Well, well, if it isn't out little Vice-President in charge of delivering messages. Tell me, Susie, does Mehary want me right now, or can he wait until I get upstairs?"

Baldy dug into his pocket, came up with his own quarter.

"Robber!" he sighed. "I should have eyes in the back of my head when I bet with you."

The Baron flipped the glistening coin. "You just didn't remember that I'm an expert on numismatics," he said glibly. "Coins are my specialty. Did I ever tell you about the time I was called in as a consultant by the Philadelphia mint. They had a problem with counterfeits that was too much for them, so—"

Baldy said, "If they once let you inside the mint, Baron, it would be just unfortunate for us taxpayers."

Behind the wide, walnut-veneer desk, with its perpetual piles of folders and reports, Ellis Mehary, District Claims Manager for Imperial Casualty, tilted his massive bulk in his swivel chair as the Baron stalked into the small, glass-enclosed sanctum.

Mehary shot a swift glance at the Baron's sharp, scowling features.

"Save me the ear ache of hearing it all again," he pleaded quickly, before the Baron had time to speak. "I know it by heart. It's quitting time; you've got a date this evening, you work twenty-five hours a day, eight days a week; your pay isn't big enough to afford you an ocean-going steam yacht."

In spite of himself, the Baron grinned. "You can say that again, boss. But it would do most good if you'd say it on your next quarterly personnel report to Home Office."

MEHARY regarded the Baron unwinkingly with his small, red-rimmed eyes.

"Now that we've got preliminaries out of the way, may we descend to the sordid matter of earning our salt in the insurance business? About eight-thirty last night the Walton Chinaware Manufacturing Company suffered a disastrous fire and explosion. Their new sales offices and warehouse collapsed. An adjuster for the Seaboard Fire Insurance Company by the name of George Slade was seriously injured when the building walls caved. Since we carry Workman's Compensation for Seaboard, this leaves us with a possibly serious compensation claim on our hands."

The Baron ran a lean nervous hand through his unruly mouse-colored hair.

"I don't see that it follows necessarily. What would a fire adjuster be doing around the pottery plant before the fire was over? And unless this man Slade was injured 'out of and during the course of his employment' by the fire company, it isn't a compensable case."

The Claims Manager's voice became a deceptive soft purr. "Are you trying to tell me the wording of the Compensation Act, Tolliver?" He brought his heavy fist against the desk top so hard the thermos jug and glasses on the corner jumped two inches. "Now, listen, while I tell you how to handle the most elementary claims job in the casualty business."

The Baron's eyes lighted. "Once when the big radio networks wanted to consult the world's best listener, they sent for me and—"

Mehary raised big paws to his ears. "I can't stand it much longer, Tolliver. I'm giving fair warning. When the boys nicknamed you Baron Munchausen because of your tall tales, they left off half a dozen names I'd like to call you."

"Pu-lease, Mr. Mehary! We mustn't forget we're both gentlemen."

Mehary's bushy brows formed a solid, ominous, gray-black line.

"One of the girls has already checked with the hospital and was informed that Slade has disappeared," the claims manager shouted. "He was brought in with a serious parietal fracture and was semi-delirious during the examination. Raving something about 'plates' and that someone had tried to kill him. What I want you to do, Tolliver, is to find Slade before something else happens to him and we have an even more serious claim to pay."

Ten minutes later the Baron had his company car headed uptown toward Slade's home. He had obtained the missing adjuster's address from the Seaboard office.

"Nothing unusual about George Slade's background," the Baron mused, thinking over his telephone conversation with the Seaboard manager as he drove along. "Years in the construction game before going into fire appraisal work. Like most fire adjusters. One thing's absolutely sure—Seaboard wouldn't try to hook us on any phony claim."

Slade's card among the mail boxes in the entrance hall of the apartment building showed the adjuster's living quarters on the second floor. As the Baron's lean, wiry body

swung into the hallway beyond the stair landing, a heavy-set man was in the very act of emerging from an apartment at the far end of the long hall.

The Baron's attention was on the numbered doors as he strode along the carpeted corridor. His observation of the man was only casual, a matter of ingrained habit. He did note the swift, almost apprehensive glance the man shot at him as they passed. But the Baron did not recognize the heavy-set man.

Subconsciously also he remarked the ponderous, flabby jowls, the blue-black shadow of ungrown beard on cheeks and chin quite freshly shaven. He noted the long, muscular arms, powerful enough to belong to Ringling's Gargantua.

"Two-twelve." The Baron stopped short before the door of George Slade's apartment. It was near the hall end, just about where the blue-bearded stranger had come from. The Baron didn't bother to knock. He just turned the knob and walked in. He knew that a man with a badly fractured skull would not drag out Emily Post's formal specifications for a social call.

And he was right. George Slade didn't care about etiquette. For his fractured skull had finally caught up with the little fire insurance adjuster. Slade was dead. The Baron closed the door softly behind him.

Slade's slight body lay on its side, arms outflung, legs drawn up toward his stomach. The setting sun, shining through casement windows, cut an orange path across the blue-gold Chinese rug on which the dead man sprawled. Orange rays spotlighted Slade's head, revealing glistening blood and matted hair.

A wave of frustration swept the Baron as he stared down at the corpse. "With this fellow dead I'm going to have a sweet time proving he wasn't at Walton's pottery on business. And when Mehary learns we have a death claim instead of only a temporary disability, he'll go up in the air like a skyrocket."

Automatically, his sharp, black eyes surveyed the room. He walked to a large flat-topped desk. Evidently Slade was accustomed to bring work home. On the desk top was a telephone. Beside the phone a daily memo pad. The top sheet bore yesterday's date. With the notation in small, neat handwriting:

Walton's for dinner, 8:00.

Next, he noticed a lacrosse stick.

It hung on the wall, net part downward, above a photograph showing a group of players.

The Baron walked over to look more closely at the picture. Names were lettered below each face in the team. Third from the left was labeled, George Slade.

Looking upward, the Baron slipped his fingers into the net of the lacrosse stick, lifting it down.

"Any lacrosse player should know better than to hang a stick upside down," he muttered. "The net should go at the top, above the picture."

In the act of turning the stick to hang it right side up, his eyes followed the handle. He stiffened suddenly. With a surge of excitement, he looked closer.

On the light yellow wood of the handle were slight smears of red. The only red of its kind in existence.

Blood! Still wet!

The Baron swung around, strode purposefully toward the body. Crouching, he peered more intently at George Slade's injured head. Finally he straightened, a new intense glow smoldering deep in his eyes.

"Maybe it was a fracture to start with," he announced aloud. "But now it's a case of deliberate murder."

WITH studied care he replaced the lacrosse stick on the wall in the same reversed position in which he found it. Having only touched the net end, he would neither have left prints nor disturbed any already on the handle.

His mind was functioning now at top speed. Suddenly it came to him that Slade's incoherent talk at the hospital about plates tied in perfectly with the business of the Walton Chinaware Manufacturing Company. He realized that Slade's assertions someone had tried to kill him was not delirious raving.

The Baron thumbed the phone book, stopped as his thumb reached "Walton, James."

"I wonder if that bird I saw in the hall might have been Walton? A cinch for anyone with such powerhouse arms to smash in a man's head with that lacrosse stick."

Mr. James Walton was not at home, the maid told him.

"Know where I could find him, lovely?" the Baron asked her, in his most sugary manner.

The maid's words were almost incoherent in her confusion.

"The Missus should be in shortly," she answered. "Said she was only going out for a little while. You wanna wait?"

The Baron stepped inside, perching on a chair near the door. The captivated maid had scarcely retreated to the rear of the house when the front door opened again.

The woman who came in was tall, solidly built. Yet markedly attractive, in spite of her somewhat Amazonian figure. It wasn't exactly comeliness, although her features were regular and entirely unlined. The Baron, always swift to size up people, had an instantaneous impression of perfect grooming, equisite taste in clothes and complete sophistication. The qualities usually summed in the one word smartness.

He rose to his feet.

"Mrs. Walton?" When she nodded, he said, "I'm Bill Tolliver of Imperial Casualty Company."

For a moment she seemed to be confused. Then abruptly "Oh, certainly," she said. "I'm sorry if I kept you waiting but I had to run down to the drugstore. You've come about the fire, of course."

The Baron interrupted her flow of words. "About the fire, yes, but indirectly. I want to talk with Mr. Walton."

She was entirely gracious now. "He should be here any moment. You'll find it comfortable waiting in the library." A jeweled hand waved toward a door at the right of the hall. "I'll ask you to pardon me while I dispose of my wraps."

The odor of stale cigar smoke greeted the Baron unpleasantly as he stepped into the large, luxuriously furnished room. On his way to a deep upholstered chair on the other side of a great stone hearth where a log fire was burning cheerily, he passed an antique, combination bookcase-secretary. The drop leaf of the desk portion was open.

Ingrained habit made him glance at the objects on the desk as he went by. He lingered for a moment. Several bills, for amounts that made the Baron purse his lips. The chinaware business must be a profitable one, he decided, if James Walton paid such amounts for his wife's frocks. Beside the bills he saw a closed checkbook, a letter from a rare coin dealer with a catalogue, and an invitation to a bridge party.

A smile crossed the Baron's sharp features. The coin catalogue reminded him of the way he had tricked Baldy Leigh out of two bits earlier that evening.

His thoughts were interrupted by the banging of the front door and hurried footsteps across the hall. He turned as a small, dapper man, dressed in a dark conservative business suit, came swiftly through the doorway.

The man's face looked strained. Oblivious of the Baron's presence he went straight to the fire, took off a pair of cheap, white, work gloves and tossed them into the blazing coals.

"Blood on them?" the Baron asked softly.

The man whirled as if stung by a hornet. His small eyes stared at the Baron as if seeing an apparition.

"Who—what the—blood?" he stuttered.

"On your gloves." The Baron motioned toward the fireplace where the cotton fabric was already going up in smoke. "Quick thinking, Mr. Walton. You are Mr. Walton, aren't you?"

The man's eyes, set much too close together, narrowed.

"Yes, I'm Walton. The gloves were dirty and torn, I couldn't have used them again. I had to change a tire myself. A man my age has no business changing tires, but there's no such thing as road service any more. Think I'll use the busses hereafter."

HE spoke rapidly, almost breathlessly. Abruptly, he seemed to realize he was defending himself.

"Who are you, young man?" he demanded belligerently. "What are you doing in my house?"

The Baron grinned, introduced himself. "Just wanted to ask you a few questions about George Slade."

"Oh, about George." Walton's evident tension lessened. "Great shame about George getting hurt. I intend dropping over to the hospital this evening to see how he's getting along."

"Save yourself the trip," the Baron said. His eyes were watching Walton intently. "George isn't at the hospital. Not even on this earth. Someone killed him about an hour ago."

"Killed him!" The manufacturer echoed, horrified. "You mean he died?"

"Who was killed?" The question came from the doorway. Both men turned. Mrs. Walton was standing just inside the room. She moved quickly toward them.

"Marie!" Walton burst out explosively. "George Slade is dead! This man says he was murdered!" He swung back toward the Baron. "How was he killed? Where?"

Briefly, the Baron outlined the circumstances of George Slade's death. Wondering as he did so, if he were telling something Walton knew better than himself. Of course Walton was not the man who had emerged from Slade's apartment. But Slade could have been dead before the blue-bearded man's visit.

"I can't think of anyone who might fit that description," Walton said relative to Slade's heavy-jowled visitor. "Can you, Maire?"

The woman shook her head decisively. "It just doesn't seem possible George could be dead. Why only last evening he was here for dinner." Her words of explanation were directed to the Baron. "James and I expected George to dine with us, but unfortunately James had some business which kept him from getting home. Then George and I got word the plant was afire. We rushed down there. George knew he'd be called upon to handle the loss for Seaboard Fire, so he decided to begin while the fire was still raging."

The Baron moistened dry lips. What the woman said didn't sound good to him. Not at all. Slade on the job for his employer meant Imperial taking it on the chin for a death claim.

The little pottery manufacturer's voice broke in on the Baron's somber thoughts.

"George Slade has been a close friend for a long time. I just can't imagine who would wish to injure him." He stiffened suddenly, seized the Baron's arm with nervous fingers. "Do you suppose this might have some significance, Mr. Tolliver? Last night, while I was at my club, I had a phone call from some unidentified person. The voice told me I might learn something of great importance if I would hide inside my office at the plant around eight o'clock."

"Wasn't that about when the fire started?" The Baron's tone was skeptical. "This voice didn't tell you there would be a fire, did it?"

Walton flushed angrily. "Of course not. I'd have been there to prevent it in that case. As it was, I dismissed the phone call as so much nonsense."

Marie Walton ended the conversation.

"I don't like your attitude, Mr. Tolliver," she pronounced icily. "I thought you'd come to discuss payment of our fire loss. But you seem to be verging on a police interrogation. You have no right. I think we shall wish you good night."

The finality of her words made it impossible for the Baron to proceed. He shrugged, picked his hat from the chair where he had left it.

Nothing remained for him to do tonight, he decided as he climbed into the company car. Tomorrow was on its way. Sleep was something he would not allow even Ellis Mehary to rob him of, in entirety.

He fell asleep later thinking of gloves, phone calls and a neat dapper little man swinging a lacrosse stick at a swift circling merry-go-round of skulls.

When he awoke, he was reaching for a brass ring in the teeth of a particularly grisly skull. Yet the clock on the bedside table said nine. Imperial's office opened at eight-thirty.

The Baron shook his head to rid himself of the ugly dreams. He reached for his phone.

"Baldy," he said, when he got an answer. "Be a pal. I need some information you can get me from your special connections. And if Mehary wants to know why I'm not in, tell him I was in the office at six this morning and I'm out again on the job. Now listen carefully . . ."

IT WAS early afternoon before the Baron met Baldy by appointment in the Live-and-Let-Live Lunchroom.

"Got the dope you wanted, Baron," Baldy said. "Your friend Walton was in as tight a spot before that fire as a nickel stuck in the neck of a beer bottle. He'd borrowed to the limit on his life insurance. He was overloaded with an inventory he couldn't even give away."

"Couldn't move his stock?" The Baron was frankly puzzled. "Don't people eat off plates any more? I know you don't but the rest of the world may."

"Cut it," Baldy protested. "I'm talking seriously. Walton's business was being slowly strangled by the new plastic industries. It would have cost him thousands to change over and he didn't have it. Neither did his wife. And incidentally, Mr. and Mrs., go their own separate ways. No particular love lost between them. That's why Walton took all he could get out of his life insurance."

The Baron clucked thoughtfully.

"Hmmm! Looks as if that fire was a gift from Heaven, then. I wonder if the angels could have been aided by strictly human hands?" He stared silently at the wall for a moment. Then, "Thanks, Baldy. For your trouble I may even let you win on the pinball machine one of these days."

Baldly jeered. "Yeah. Like you let me win that quarter last evening?"

The Baron laughed. "As Mehary would say, when you gamble you must be prepared to lose. I shall be seeing you, my friend."

He himself was gambling, the Baron realized, as he drove from his meeting with Baldy straight to the fire swept plant of Walton Chinaware Manufacturing Company. Gambling his time and effort and the possibility of severe criticism from Mehary against nothing more substantial than a persistent feel of some connection between Walton and

the dead George Slade.

But the increasing weight of small evidence uncovered during his investigation convinced the Baron he was on the right track. The entirely too providential timing of the fire so the tottering Walton business would be salvaged. Walton's fishy-sounding tale of the mysterious phone call warning of impending disaster. The man's destruction of the cotton work gloves.

Yet other items failed to fall into place properly. What motive, for instance could Walton have had for the slaying of the fire adjuster? And who was the heavy-jowled stranger who visited Slade's apartment?

As he ducked under the sidewalk barriers erected by the police department to stumble around in the debris of the fire blackened warehouse, the Baron found nothing interesting at first. The place was a complete wreck, still reeking with the smell of charred timbers and burnt packing material. The floor was littered with smashed china, veritable hills of broken fragments.

At the far end of the newly built portion, the Baron's sharp roving eye noted a long, twisted steel rod, one end lying free on the burnt rubble, the other end still clinging to the inside wall. It drew the Baron's attention since he knew tie rods were used to hold together walls where construction was weak or masonry unstable.

"But a new building?" His face screwed up in earnest thought. "Why use tie rods and plates—plates!" Sudden realization reached him. "That's what Slade was raving about. Not china plates but steel ones! Wall plates."

Stooping, the Baron examined the fallen end of the tie rod more closely, running his fingers over it.

"Smooth cut, but rough edges," he murmured. "Someone's used a hacksaw on this. Which means someone wanted the wall to fall—right where it did. And that's where Slade got his fracture."

A shadow passed one of the blown out windows of the almost demolished sales office adjoining. A man was attached to the shadow. A heavy-jowled man with a blue-black line of ungrown beard on cheeks and chin. The man the Baron had last seen leaving George Slade's rooms.

The Baron leaped across a pile of scorched timbers, tripped, fell. By the time he picked himself up and raced toward the sales office, the man had seen him and started to run. But he was only a few feet ahead of the Baron.

Grimly the Baron resolved his quarry should not escape. Launching himself in a headlong dive, his lean, strong arms wrapped themselves about thick legs. The Baron rolled to ease his fall. He and the man landed together in a heap of broken dishes.

TWISTING lithely, the Baron came up on top of his opponent. The man's face flushed red with anger and exertion. He stared up at the Baron with watery, gray eyes.

The Baron twisted a hand in the fallen man's coat collar, hauled him ungently to his feet.

"W-w-what the blue blazes go-goes on here?" the man sputtered. He shook his head groggily, as if dazed by his fall.

"I only wanted to ask you a few questions and then you started running so I had to stop you," the Baron said. "You see, I was the fellow you passed in the hall when you left Slade's apartment last evening. Remember?"

The man brushed dirt and ashes from his clothes. "You've got the wrong number, mister. I don't know any Slade. My name's Connor and I'm no fire insurance adjuster. I'm a builder."

"Tsk, tsk!" the Baron said. "You never heard of Slade, yet you know he was a fire adjuster. That's marvelous!" His tone changed, dropping the banter, becoming stern. "My eyes are excellent, Connor. You're the man I saw coming from Slade's place. I think maybe I know the reason for your call, now. Anyone can see there's been rotten construction work on this new addition. Someone must have cleaned up plenty from that chiseling. Slade may even have threatened criminal charges against the man responsible for the collapse. But with Slade out of the way, the crookedness in the contract work might be covered up. That makes plenty of sense."

The contractor's lips drew taut. His watery eyes were less belligerent. The Baron noted this and waited.

"Perhaps I'd better explain." Connor rubbed his jaw with one huge paw-like hand. "A few months ago I found out one of my field superintendents shorting jobs under his supervision. I was afraid at the time this Walton job was one he'd skimped. When I heard that the walls had collapsed, I was sure. Then I learned Slade had been hurt. I knew he would have seen the crummy construction so I went to his home to talk it over with him."

"I'll say you did." The Baron was grim and unsmiling. "You wield a wicked lacrosse

stick, Mr. Connor."

"Lacrosse stick?"

"You heard me! Slade was killed with one. Recall it?"

The man's heavy face was white. The Baron saw stark fright in the moist eyes.

"Slade was dead on the floor when I walked in," Connor answered in a tone of desperation. "I didn't want to be roped into the affair so I got out of there in a hurry."

"The cops are likely to be peevish, all right. In this state cold blooded murder is frowned upon."

"No. No!" The man's fright was deadly urgent. "That fire was started by the explosion. And it was deliberate. I found out gas was piped with a piece of hose from one of the firing kilns into the air conditioning unit in Walton's office."

Connor was breathing deep and shallow, as if he'd run a race.

"Come. I'll show you."

The Baron hesitated. He didn't trust the contractor. A dozen questions buzzed in the back of his mind.

"Okay," he said, finally. "Let's have a look."

Connor picked his way through the stale-smelling rubbish, the Baron behind him. Whether or not Mehary liked it, the Baron promised himself, the old swindle sheet would cover a shine, his laundry and the cost of dry-cleaning his suit.

Connor reached the small portion of the sales office wall still standing, stepped around it. Four seconds later, when the Baron rounded the same corner, the contractor had disappeared completely. A small window opened from the salesroom into the warehouse. Blown out, only a ragged opening remained.

The Baron darted over, stared into darkness and piled debris. It was useless trying to pursue Connor. Behind heaps of smelly, soaked straw and excelsior, mountains of charred packing boxes, were a thousand places to hide.

The Baron sighed and moved away. From habit, he began to look around the demolished office. In the center of the room a large desk still remained. Scorched papers lay on it. An inkwell, with only half a pen shaft, ornamented its deeply charred, flat top. A china lamp, china shade smashed to atoms, stood like a lone sentinel among the lesser debris.

The Baron rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I wonder how an explosion could have been set off in here so as to appear accidental?" He walked over to the ventilator which was almost ripped apart. "Anyone who came in here would have smelled the gas. Only a fool would light a match or smoke."

HIS eyes came to rest on the light switch by the door he and Connor had come through.

"Ceiling lights! But no ceiling left and no lights." He was standing beside the desk, idly fingering the cord attached to the blackened, smashed, china lamp.

He snapped his fingers sharply. Pulling on the cord, he disclosed the end of the wire bare and stripped.

If the lamp had been connected to the center lights above the desk, when the ceiling had takn off for parts unknown, the cord would have ripped loose from the plug connection with its end torn off.

Quickly the Baron unscrewed the broken segments of bulb still remaining in the lamp socket. In his haste he cut his fingers on the thin, sharp edges. But he hardly felt the pain. His hunch had been correct!

Nesting in the bottom of the socket was a scorched and blackened dime. When the light had been turned on at the door, that dime had shorted out the current. The resultant spark must have erupted the place like an angry volcano.

Digging out the dime, the Baron rubbed it between his fingers. His breath caught in his throat as he stared down at it. It was no ordinary dime, but an old-timer whose date the Baron just couldn't believe. A rare piece and plenty valuable.

He dropped the coin into his pocket. The confusion in his mind was beginning to clarify.

"It won't take more than a half hour more," he said to himself as he again picked up the strand of wire. "Two short calls to make sure, then I'm ready to visit George Slade's killer. I'll con—"

The shadow which swept toward him was not nebulous. It had weight as it descended upon the Baron's skull. For a second he seemed to be staring into a million candlepower light. Then as suddenly it switched off into blackness. . . .

When there was light again, it was weak. The Baron lay for a moment wondering about that. Then awareness returned. Fading daylight, he realized, was what he was looking at. Through the jagged remains of what had formerly been the roof of James Walton's new sales office.

Moving cautiously because each movement jarred his violently throbbing head into new

spasms, he climbed to his feet. Wincing with his physical hurt, he began slowly turning each pocket inside out.

The ancient dime was gone.

The Baron was not surprised. Whoever had set off the explosion had made an unintentional error in using the ancient coin. Probably because of excitement and nervous tension at that time. Later, however, the criminal must have missed the coin, realized the error, and decided that if it were found it could be incriminating. Therefore, it had to be recovered.

The Baron cursed softly. It incriminated all right, but without it he had little proof. Perhaps if he got busy in a hurry, however, he could mend all that.

He pulled out the shorted socket and pocketed it. Hastening out, he drove to the nearest pay phone booth. He called the Acme Coin Company, and inquired if they had a coin of the same date he'd seen on the dime found in the socket.

"I'm sorry, sir, but we sold the only one we had of that issue just day before yesterday," the clerk said apologetically.

"Do you keep a record of coin sales and dates and to whom sold?" the Baron wanted to know.

"Indeed we do, sir," the clerk answered. "If you'll wait a moment, I'll look up the name and address in the ledger."

After a protracted delay, he finally gave the Baron the promised information.

The Baron hung up. He was satisfied, although he hadn't learned anything he hadn't already figured. What he wanted was proof that the coin belonged to the person he suspected.

Ten minutes later he stopped at a drugstore. Only one clerk was behind the counter.

"Could you tell me who was on duty here day before yesterday around seven in the evening?"

The clerk grinned. "I was. Why?"

The Baron nodded toward the girl at the soda fountain. "Was she on at the same time?"

The clerk shook his head. "No, I was here alone. She goes to dinner around that time. Why?"

"Then you'd remember anybody that came in and stayed awhile?"

The clerk drew up his shoulders. "I'll say! I've been here ten years and know everybody that comes here regular."

THE Baron began to ask questions. When the clerk got through, the Baron had enough material for a confession magazine.

"Whew!" he breathed as he left. "That clerk belongs in a public information booth. I'll bet he could name the breakfast food of everybody within a mile."

Driving around the block, the Baron started whistling. He had shot an alibi sky-high. His discoveries were a whip with which he hoped to get the necessary information about Slade's illegal part in that explosion.

If only he had that dime.

He tooled the car to the curb, got out and ran up the steps of a house set back slightly from the street. No lights were visible. The Baron dug at the bell button, waited, then dug at it again.

When there was still no answer he went back down the steps, circled the house to see if any lights were on at the sides or back. But everything was dark.

"Nobody home, I guess." For a moment he was disgusted. Then a new idea struck him. Maybe he could get that dime.

"This may be a lucky break, or perhaps I'm just leading with my chin," he muttered to himself.

He went back to the car and selected a tire iron. From the glove compartment, he took a small flashlight. Then he slipped around to the side of the house where trees made it darkest. Finding a low window, he applied the tire iron as a jimmy.

For an instant his nerve almost failed him. What would Mehary say if told he had a burglar on the Claims Department payroll?

He recalled the bloody head of George Slade and his resolution stiffened. He levered down on the tire iron.

The latch on the window gave way with a loud cracking noise. The Baron shrunk into the shadow, filled with qualms again.

"I'd never make a success as a housebreaker," he muttered. "My nerves couldn't stand the strain."

But he had gone too far now to back down. Quietly he pushed the window up, hauled himself through. Shining the flashlight on the floor, he headed toward the front of the empty house.

He found the library, hurriedly began going through a desk he'd spotted with the light. He pulled open all the drawers, but didn't find a single coin anywhere. The large drawer in the center contained a small pearl handled revolver, fully loaded.

"I'm glad my friend didn't carry this when I got socked or maybe Imperial would have lost its best claim's investigator." He

chuckled as he examined it closely, then thrust it back into the drawer and whipped his flash around the room.

Fifteen minutes later he'd examined everything in the place that might offer a spot for the coin. He shrugged, made his way back to the desk and then left. He planned one more try.

He drove back to the drugstore, made a phone call, tossed down a cup of scalding coffee that nearly burned the lining off his throat, and leisurely drove back to the house again. This time the Baron parked about a hundred feet from the entrance.

A half hour passed. A car drove up and stopped half a block behind him. Its lights went off. The Baron grunted, settled to waiting again. He didn't wait long before another car swept up the street and pulled up at the entrance. A tall, solid figure stepped out, went into the house. Lights flared on the first floor.

The Baron leaped out and made his way up the steps again. He punched the bell hard.

Mrs. James Walton opened the door.

The Baron said "good evening" and stepped in without being invited. Without further ado he headed toward the library.

Mrs. Walton followed hurriedly.

"Just what is the idea, Mr. Tolliver," she said icily. "Why are you entering my house this way?"

The Baron laughed inwardly at that. If she had been here half an hour ago she could have really griped.

"Mr. Walton isn't at home," she went on. "And I'm in a hurry. I'm going out right away."

"You wouldn't be figuring on killing Mr. Walton tonight, would you?"

She drew back, startled. "I what! Are you crazy, Mr. Tolliver?"

"Better have a chair." The Baron waved his hand. "This might be hard to take standing. You see, I know who killed Slade and tried to kill your husband."

INSTANTLY the woman's eyes narrowed. She stared at the Baron frigidly.

"Who?"

"You, Mrs. Walton!" The Baron said it simply. "You had it all figured out to rid yourself of a bankrupt husband and a not too bright lover. But Slade didn't get killed as you planned, so you had to do it later, the hard, nasty way."

"You're absurd! Why George Slade and I were friends. Very good friends."

"You can say that again," the Baron admitted. "Very, very good friends. Such good friends that even the clerk at the drug-store told me about it. Everyone in the neighborhood, except your husband, was wise to the affair you two were having."

"Dirty-minded gossip!" the woman began defensively.

"It doesn't matter now," the Baron said. "You've got more serious things to worry about. For instance, the alibi you tried to create for yourself by telling me you'd just returned from the drug-store last night."

"I had," Marie Walton insisted. Her large, bright eyes never wavered from the Baron's face.

"That drug clerk says not," he told her quietly. "And there was no reason last evening for you to explain to me, a total stranger, where you'd been. Unless you were trying to cover up. Which you were. Actually, you'd come from Slade's apartment. Where you hit him with the lacrosse stick across his already badly fractured skull. If you hadn't been so excited, if you'd known something about lacrosse, you wouldn't have hung the stick upside down."

"Why should I want to kill George Slade?" she demanded.

"So you wouldn't have to share the insurance you'd collect on your husband's obsolete, frozen, chinaware inventory."

"How would collecting Jimmie's business insurance profit me?" she snapped, white-lipped.

"You had it all figured. Slade was to engineer the fire. With his knowledge as a fire adjuster, he could furnish the expert touch to make it appear accidental. And your husband was supposed to die under the collapsing walls of his own plant. At first I thought Slade might have made that mysterious phone call to lure your husband to his death. But evidently you'd looked even farther ahead than your boy friend. You wanted to eliminate Slade, too.

"Maybe the two of you planned the fire for a day later. You sent Slade down to check the arrangements, perhaps asking him to make the final connection between the kiln gas and your husband's air conditioning equipment. Or perhaps to saw the tie rods so a total loss would be assured. But you'd been there first, fixed the gas connection, planted your coin in the light bulb. When Slade showed up there, things blew up in his face. It was your tough luck Slade wasn't killed outright. And that your husband paid no attention to your phone call."

"Of course you can prove all these wild accusations?" Marie Walton had moved to-

ward her secretary-desk.

"I can prove it was you who set off the explosion," the Baron said. "I saw the Acme Coin Company's catalogue on your desk when I was here last evening and I called them. They admitted selling you a rare old dime several days ago. You used that coin the other night, probably grabbing it out of your purse in a hurry and not realizing what it was. And with the socket and the dime I've proof enough."

"But you don't have the dime!" She was smiling confidently now. Oddly enough, she seemed at the moment even more self-possessed than before.

"That's right," the Baron said quietly. "But I will have."

"You're wrong, Mr. Tolliver." Her voice was serene, deadly cool. "I could have hit harder. Killed you then. But it won't matter, now"

The Baron didn't show any fear as he looked into the muzzle of a small, pearl-handled revolver. She had grabbed it from the desk drawer when he'd turned his head a moment.

"I want to thank you, Mr. Tolliver," she said with sarcastic politeness. "You've done me a great favor in pointing out my mistakes. There's still time to correct them. With you out of the way, no one will know about either the coin or the drug-store."

The Baron rose, stepped to the table where Mrs. Walton had laid her bag. He reached out, took it in his hand.

"Go ahead and shoot, Mrs. Walton," he said calmly as he opened the gold fastener. "I came here to find that dime and I'm getting it."

The woman's face was a mask of hatred. Her hand holding the gun shook.

"One more dead man won't make any difference, Mr. Tolliver!" Her voice was suddenly tired, desperate.

She pulled the trigger of the little gun.

THE Baron's hand came out of her bag holding the dime between his forefinger and thumb. "Try it again," he advised the stupefied woman. "It won't make any noise. I took the bullets out."

She pulled the trigger frantically. Five times it clicked emptily. Then she dropped it to the floor.

"I figured you'd give yourself away," the Baron said as he pocketed the dime. "I really didn't have any proof of your killing Slade or the attempt on your husband. But it all added up. Now you've confirmed it by making an attempt to—shall we say—eradicate me."

A sudden hopeful light leaped into the woman's eyes. "You still have no proof! My word is as good as yours."

"In this case it's better," the Baron agreed. "The police would not have taken my word unsupported, but you've admitted everything in their presence." He raised his voice. "Captain Cramer! You'd better come in now and take over."

The library door was filled with the huge figure of police Captain Cramer.

"Nice work, Tolliver," he said. "We heard the whole thing."

"I knew you'd be there, Captain," the Baron admitted. "I saw a car stop behind mine outside, and I recognized it. After I told you over the phone to use that back window, I had to hurry in after her myself for fear she'd see the damage and spoil the set-up."

Marie Walton's face was a study in conflicting emotions. She didn't say a word.

Cramer laughed. "She could lodge a charge against us both as housebreakers, but where she's going the only charge she'll have will be electrical."

The next morning the Baron sipped his coffee, blew his breath out sharply.

"Whew! That's hot. Almost as hot as the new offer I turned down."

Baldy Leigh, across the table from the Baron, raised his eyebrows.

"What offer?"

The Baron eyed Baldly curiously. "Walton's. He wants a partner in the new plastic firm he's going to set up with the insurance money."

"And you turned it down?" Baldy asked. "Why, with all the dough you've made chiseling your friends, you should be able to buy quite a slice of the Walton business."

An eager light appeared in the Baron's eyes. "Maybe I'll change my mind. He may need me. Did you know that when plastics first came in, I was working on a process to create elasticity in—"

"You've reached the elastic limit now," Baldy interrupted him. "It's time to get back to work."

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Next Issue: THE BARON BRINGS HOME THE BACON,
Another Bill Tolliver Story by CURTISS T. GARDNER

Sergeant Allen Kent, Home on Leave, Sets Out to Help His Constable Uncle Solve a Crime!

"Constable, this is Cynthia Lawlor"

MURDER OF A LOVELY LADY

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

"SO YOU'RE a sergeant." Old Constable Joel Kent eyed his strapping nephew in khaki with open admiration. "That's great, Allen. You know, when I was elected constable forty-one years ago, I figured maybe this town would grow and some day I'd wear a uniform and some stripes. It didn't, and I stayed where I was. I even dreamed of a lieutenant's bars."

"Who doesn't?" Sergeant Allen Kent grinned amiably. "How is the constable business, Uncle Joel?"

"Middling. Locked up old man Hoskins for beating up his wife again. Does it regular as clockwork. Then there were two bums I didn't like the looks of, and of course last Saturday night Mike Brophy got drunk again. Keeps a man stepping. Specially when he's getting on, as I am . . . Allen, what branch of the service are you in, anyhow? You never mentioned in your letters."

"Military Intelligence," Sergeant Kent said.

Constable Joel Kent whistled softly. "So that's why you didn't mention it. All right, boy, I won't ask any questions. You follow spies and prevent sabotage, no doubt. I wouldn't even be surprised if you parachuted onto some of those Jap islands and became a spy. Military Intelligence! Whew!"

"Now wait," Allen Kent said hastily. "Don't start building me up."

"You're modest," the older man chuckled. "Always were and . . . There's the phone. That'll be Abigail telling us dinner is ready. Answer it, will you?"

Allen Kent unwound long legs from around the chair he occupied, stretched a lean, brown arm for the instrument and spoke a greeting.

A woman's voice came over the wire. Not

that of his Aunt Abigail. This was a highly cultured voice, for all its qualities of terror and excitement.

"Constable, this is Cynthia Lawlor. I'm in danger! I want you to come here as fast as you can. I won't say any more over the telephone, and don't worry about me. I have a gun and you are aware that I know how to use it. Please hurry!"

The phone clicked in Allen's ear. He looked over at his uncle.

"It was a woman named Cynthia Lawlor. Said she was in terrible danger and she had a gun."

Constable Kent arose quickly, opened a drawer and stuffed a large revolver into his pocket.

"When Cynthia says something," he said, "she means it. Though I can't, for the life of me, see why she should be threatened by anyone. Allen, you come along with me. It's a fine chance for you to show what you can do. Imagine! Me having a Military Intelligence man along. Now don't argue and don't play modest. No time. Cynthia never exaggerates."

CONSTABLE Kent had a good, fast car and he knew how to drive it. He roared down the main street of the New England village and wished, aloud, that his car was equipped with a siren.

"She sounded like a nice lady," Allen remarked.

The constable never took his eyes off the road. "She's—how can I describe her?—a lovely lady. Yep, that's it. A real lovely lady. Spinster, about sixty now, I expect, gauging from my own years. Lived here all her life and once she was engaged to the Trilby brothers—both of 'em at the same time."

"That's a funny romance," Allen observed.

"Not according to Cynthia's way of thinking, Allen. She was in love with both boys—Lance and Mark. She didn't agree to marry either one of 'em until she had time to make up her mind which one she wanted. Well, it so happened that she never married at all. Thirty years ago—Mark Trilby's buggy went over Noble's cliff. Mark got smashed up and he's been a cripple ever since. Tied right in a wheel-chair all that time."

"Tough," Allen observed. "I suppose he wouldn't let Cynthia marry him, and she wouldn't marry Lance. Is that it?"

Constable Kent's pride showed in his eyes. "There you are! Shows what Military Intelligence officers can do. Yep—you hit it right smack on the head. Cynthia lives in a big house right next door to the Trilby home. She never married and there ain't a soul, except herself, knows which one of those brothers she really loved."

Allen saw the two houses a little later. They were on the outskirts of the village. Both were elaborate homes of the type popular thirty-odd years ago. Carefully tended shrubs and trees dotted the yards, and a neat white fence continued in one unbroken line around both places, as if they were one.

Constable Kent rolled to a stop and got out in a hurry. Allen joined him and they ran to the porch. There was no answer to the clamor of the bell. Constable Kent looked at his broad-shouldered nephew with a question in his eyes.

Allen sensed that something must have happened. He stepped over to a window, raised his foot and kicked a hole in the glass. A moment later he was inside and hurrying to open the door for his uncle. Allen's nostrils twitched. He had detected an odor which had become familiar to him on the target range. Cordite!

They called Cynthia Lawlor's name without result. Allen ran to the rear of the house while his uncle went upstairs. One by one, Allen inspected the rooms until he came to the one at the rear of the premises. The door was closed. He opened it with some trepidation, for he was unused to things like this.

What he saw sent air rattling over a dry throat. He opened his mouth to shout for his uncle and no sound came out. He had to swallow a couple of times before his larynx worked.

Cynthia Lawlor sat in a swivel chair. It had been rotated so that she faced the rear windows instead of the old-fashioned roll-top desk. There was a gun in her hand, resting in her lap. Across the front of the white lace collar setting off the rather severe black dress, was a swath of blood. She was dead. Allen knew that even before he gingerly felt for a pulse.

Joel came in and stopped short. Then he did an unusual thing for Joel Kent. He commenced swearing softly and steadily.

"Murder, that's what it is!" He spoke positively. "Plain murder! Cynthia Lawlor never took her own life—not even if things look like it. I'm lucky you're here, Allen. This is way over my head."

"And over mine, maybe higher than yours," Allen put in quickly. "Uncle Joel, you're just getting things tangled up when you believe I can—"

"Modesty again." The constable waved a hand. "No time for it. See what you can do about finding the murderer. Look—she's facing that open window. It's a low window, goes down to within a couple of feet of the ground. That's because the house is on a small knoll. Somebody came here to kill her. She knew it and telephoned, but the murderer worked faster than me. He shot her through that open window."

Allen Kent nodded. "There are no powder marks on her dress, and though it's black I think they could be seen if there were any. You may be right. I'm going out the win-

dow and see if there are any footprints."

Allen clambered through the window, being careful not to mess up the shrubbery below. He asked his uncle to pass out a flashlight and with the aid of this he studied the ground.

"Uncle Joel!" he called softly. "There is something. No footprints. Not a sign of any, but there are marks of some kind of vehicle. I can't figure it out, but I'm going to try and trail those marks. Meet me in back."

"I'll be there in two minutes," Joel said proudly. "Mighty glad you come home on leave just when the first murder of my career happens. And you in Military Intelligence and all."

ALLEN opened his mouth to protest again, but shut it. What was the use? Anyway, there were important things to be done. He sprayed the ground with the flashlight beam and slowly followed those narrow wheel marks until they came to a path of hard earth. There they merged with dozens of other similar tracks. Allen stared at them. It looked as if about fifty of those odd pairs of wheels had rolled over the path.

Constable Kent knew what they meant and horror came to his kindly, wrinkled old face.

"Allen, those marks were made by Mark Trilby's wheel-chair! He used to wheel himself over to see Cynthia every day. But he always rolled right up that ramp onto the back porch. She had it put there special for him. What was he doing rolling his chair across the lawn and up to that back window?"

Allen looked across toward the Trilby house. About half of it was illuminated.

"Maybe if we asked Mark, he could tell us," he suggested.

"Come on." Constable Kent nudged him. "I telephoned Doc Brady, but it'll take him fifteen-twenty minutes to get here. We'll see what Mark has to say about this. Awful, ain't it?"

They rang the bell of the Trilby residence and soon heard footsteps. Through a window in the door they saw a rangy man hurrying down the steps, running fingers through a shock of gray hair as if exasperated.

"That's Lance Trilby," Joel Kent said.

Lance opened the door and stared at the two men. Constable Kent nudged his nephew, meaning for him to do the talking.

"I'm Allen Kent," Allen said hurriedly. "Joel's nephew. We're here because somebody just murdered Miss Cynthia Lawlor."

"Cynthia—murdered?" Lance Trilby said in a hollow voice, as if he couldn't quite take in the word. "Murdered? Impossible! Who'd want to murder . . . How did it happen? When? Who did it?"

"She was shot," Allen said gently, as he realized the agitation of the gray-haired man. "It happened only a few minutes ago because she had just called on the phone for Uncle Joel to hurry to her home. We don't know who did it."

"Find him—or her!" Lance Trilby said slowly. "I'll see to it that whoever killed her pays! I'll strangle—"

"Whoa now," Constable Kent broke in. "Take it easy, Lance."

"I loved her," Lance went on dully. "All my life I loved her. Now she's dead."

"Where's Mark?" Joel asked.

Lance Trilby gulped. "I wonder how he'll take it. He loved her too. Just as much as I did. I . . . We'd better go tell him. You do it, Joel. It may kill him. He lived for her—just her. He'll die now, just as sure as I'm talking to you men."

"Allen will tell him," Joel said. "He's a regular detective. Belongs to Military Intelligence. Good, too. You should have seen the way he found those wheel-chair tracks."

"What tracks?" Lance asked quickly. "You mean those made by Mark's chair? Why, they can't mean anything. He used to roll himself over there five times a day sometimes."

"We'll go into that later," Allen said. "I think Mark should be told now. Will you take us to him?"

Lance Trilby licked his lips, turned and walked rapidly toward the rear of the house. He knocked on a closed door. Knocked again and again. No answer. Allen stepped to the door and twisted the knob. It opened readily on a lighted room.

Mark Trilby sat in his wheel-chair. A blanket covered his knees. His features were composed, peaceful—and he was dead.

Lance Trilby staggered out of the room without speaking a word. Allen approached the wheel-chair.

"There are no marks of violence on him," he said. "I think he died naturally."

"We've got to be sure," Joel said. "Doc Brady will tell us."

Joel Kent sat down slowly while Allen studied the corpse in the wheel-chair. Mark Trilby must have weighed two hundred and eighty. His had been a jelly-like obesity brought on by enforced inactivity.

"I'll talk to Lance again," Allen said. "You'd better go over to the Lawlor place and wait for Doc Brady, Uncle Joel."

Joel Kent arose. "I can trust you to handle everything, Allen. The luckiest day of my life was when they put you into Military Intelligence. I'm an old man—stupid in a lot of ways—and this calls for the quick thinking of a young man, one highly trained like you are." He hurried out of the house.

LANCE TRILBY was slumped in a big chair in the spacious living room when Allen found him. Lance didn't even seem to

notice Allen's arrival, or that he sat down opposite him.

"Your brother is dead," Allen said.

Lance raised his head slowly. "I know. It was his heart. I didn't expect it quite so soon, but I'm glad he didn't know about —her. For both of us there was no one like Cynthia. One of us was to have married her many years ago, but she couldn't make up her mind between us. Then Mark was hurt and became a cripple. He wouldn't marry her then, because he hated sympathy. I couldn't marry her because that would be taking advantage of my brother. That's the way it went."

"Her death must be avenged," Allen said quietly. "We're going to need your help. Did she have any enemies?"

"No," Lance said. "Everyone liked her. You couldn't help it. She was a—a lovely lady."

Allen thought it odd that Lance described her in the same words his uncle had. They could both be right, and the murder of Cynthia Lawlor not inspired by hatred for her.

Lance pressed both hands against his temples. "I'm getting something," he said vaguely. "Yes—it may help. Cynthia's cousin. Fred Carlton. He used to live with her until she made him get out. He drank too much. He lives at the Homestead Inn now. Cynthia was well off. Maybe Fred Carlton was to get her money and he couldn't wait."

Allen got up. "I'll see Fred Carlton . . . Oh—here comes Uncle Joel and Doc Brady. We'll soon learn the truth about your brother, at any rate. Was he being treated?"

"Not to my knowledge," Lance said. "He hated doctors—after what he went through."

Doc Brady was middle-aged, efficient and terse. He shook hands with Allen.

"Joel tells me you work for Military Intelligence and he expects you to solve this mess. Hope you do, but what training in Military Intelligence has to do . . . Oh well, no matter. I wish you luck. Now where is Mark?"

Doc Brady came out of the dead man's room shortly.

"I'd say that Mark's heart gave out on him," he announced. "No signs of violence on his body. Of course I'll do a post-mortem. With your permission, Lance."

"Of course." Lance waved a hand. "Anything to learn the truth. Doc, you don't think he killed Cynthia?"

Doc Brady blinked. "Mark—murder Cynthia? I'll believe that when the world turns into a mass of cream cheese. When the moon comes down and the sun goes black . . . Say, anybody thought of that cousin of hers? What's his name—Carlton?"

Allen nodded. "Doc, take me back to town with you. Uncle Joel will have to stay here."

Doc Brady was not a fast driver, and as he drove back to town he related the already familiar story of Cynthia Lawlor's attachment to the two Trilby brothers and how much they had cared for her. It was the love story of generations, known by everyone in the village.

"I tended Mark when he was hurt," Doc said. "Not much I could do, of course. I was a young squirt then without too much experience so I sent him to Vanceton, to the big hospital there. His case was hopeless. Everyone thought Cynthia would marry Lance after that happened, but she didn't. She told her friends she wouldn't marry either one—just keep on loving both. A real nice lady, she was."

"That accident," Allen asked. "Just what happened?"

"Nobody ever really knew—except maybe Cynthia. She was with Mark. He had a team of fast horses. He and Cynthia were taking a ride. Mark used to drive those horses pretty fast. He liked speed. Well, the buggy pitched over a cliff. Cynthia jumped and wasn't hurt, but Mark went over the cliff with the team."

Allen got out in front of the hotel, thanked the doctor, and walked in. He got the number of Fred Carlton's room and went up there. A burly, rather coarse man faced him when the door opened.

"I'm sort of a deputy to the constable in town," Allen explained a trifle lamely. "Miss Cynthia Lawlor was murdered a short time ago, so—"

"Cynthia—dead?" The burly man removed a stub of a cigar from his mouth and gaped. "Holy jumping . . . Say, that means her money goes to—"

"You?" Allen asked. "I wondered about that. You might begin by telling me where you've been for the past hour or so."

"Why should I answer questions?" the burly man growled. "I ain't Fred Carlton. I just share his room and we're in business together. I'm George Frescott."

"Why didn't you say so?" Allen snapped irritably. "Where's Carlton?"

"Search me. I left him at the office of the little plant we run. Castings—war stuff. He said he'd come to the hotel in time for dinner, but he didn't. Fact—he never even answered the phone when I called the plant."

"You seem to know a great deal about his business," Allen said. "Tell me—does he inherit Cynthia Lawlor's estate?"

"He says so." Frescott shrugged. "I never saw the will, of course. Say I'm worried about him. Mind you, I won't believe he sneaked up there and killed her even if she hated him, and he didn't have much use for her prissy ways. Maybe I'd better go down to the factory and see if Fred's there."

"We'll both go," Allen said flatly.

FRESCOTT drove and he seemed to be worried, but said nothing. When they entered the factory office, they found no

signs of Fred Carlton. Then they searched the deserted factory. It was a small place and they soon found him. He was dangling from one of the large crucible hooks and he was dead. His feet were some inches above the floor and an overturned box indicated that he had stepped upon it, adjusted the noose and kicked the box away.

"This is awful!" Frescott groaned. "Listen, Officer—I'm going to talk! I'm going to spill everything I know because I'll be involved in this. I don't pretend to know what happened to Cynthia Lawlor. Offhand, I'd say Fred killed her, got remorseful and knocked himself off. But here is where I fit in. Fred and I were partners. This business wasn't on too sound a financial basis, so we made out wills. If he died, I got his whole estate. Now if he comes into what Miss Lawlor left, I'll be rich and it'll give me a motive for knocking off both of 'em! So help me, I didn't do it!"

Allen Kent hardly seemed to be hearing him. He ordered the badly shaken partner of the dead man to fetch a tape measure. Armed with this, Allen made measurements and took notes. Slowly he rolled the tape back on its spool.

"Stick around," he told Frescott. "Don't try to leave town or you'll automatically throw more suspicion on yourself."

"Me," Frescott said dismally, "I'm going to the hotel bar and drink myself stiff!"

Allen borrowed Frescott's car and drove back to the Lawlor home. The undertaker's men had been there already and the body had been removed. He found a weeping old woman in the living room. She was Lizzie Elliot, who had been Cynthia Lawlor's housekeeper for years. She knew Allen too.

"Your uncle is over at the Trilby house, Allen," she said. "It's awful! Poor Miss Cynthia!"

"Did she leave much money to her cousin, Fred Carlton?" Allen inquired.

"To Fred? Why—why no. Maybe I hadn't ought to tell you this, Allen, but Joel is the constable and your uncle and all. Miss Cynthia made a will last year. All her money went to Mark Trilby, but if he died, it went to Fred." She raised both hands in horror, at a sudden thought. "You don't think Fred killed her and then killed Mark?"

"I doubt that," Allen admitted. "Lizzie, Fred is dead too."

"Fred dead too?" Lizzie Elliot repeated softly. "I can't believe it!"

"Tell me about when he lived here. He drank too much, didn't he? That's why she put him out?"

Lizzie Elliot dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief.

"Well, partly. But Fred was too nosey. There are certain things Miss Cynthia wanted kept secret. There! I've gone and said too much."

"Miss Cynthia is dead," Allen reminded her gently. "We're trying to find her murderer. If she had any secrets, tell me about them. You can't hurt her now."

Lizzie hesitated, then apparently decided Allen was right.

"Well," she said, "there's her bedroom, for instance. You come with me and I'll show it to you. That's better'n me trying to explain."

Upstairs, Allen looked into a bedchamber furnished in the style of thirty years ago. There were samplers on the walls, old pictures, a stuffed bird under glass, mounted butterflies, and even a stereoptican. The pictures that went with it were old photos—of Cynthia, Mark and Lance.

The windows were barred heavily, the door had two burglar chains and two stout locks. Cynthia, apparently, sealed herself into this bedroom by night. Above the old-fashioned bed was a small picture hook and marks on the paper indicated that a small picture had hung there. The paper was not faded out around that spot, which tended to show the picture had not been there all the time.

Allen asked Lizzie about it.

"I don't know!" she half-wailed. "That was one of Miss Cynthia's secrets. The other was in the—the barn. She kept that all locked up too."

Allen started searching the room. He went through it thoroughly, but found no hidden picture, nothing to match those marks on the wall. Cynthia Lawlor must have hung that picture over her bed only by night and in the morning had removed and hidden it.

"Was there anything else?" he asked Lizzie.

"Well—only the metal box she used to keep in that bureau drawer. It's not there any more. I looked when you opened the drawer. She told me never to touch that box and if I ever found it open accidental-like—if she forgot to lock it—I wasn't to look inside."

ALLEN frowned. The metal box was missing, so was the mysterious picture. Perhaps the secret of the barn was intact. He hurried out there, armed with an old lantern. The barn had never been converted into a garage and the two big doors were stoutly locked. Allen was past caring much about damaging things now. He smashed the lock with a heavy bar of metal he found.

Inside the barn was only one thing. A wrecked buggy!

"That's Mr. Mark's buggy!" Lizzie cried. "The very one that he went over the cliff in. I remember it. I remember the red and gold designs on it."

Allen sat down on a box. "But why on earth did she have it brought here? Why

did she keep it all these years? The thing doesn't make sense. Unless . . . Lizzie, you come with me and hold the lantern. I want to examine the wheel-chair marks outside that window."

Allen found them easily and took careful note of the fact that they were not deep except where the wheel-chair had come to rest, almost against the side of the house. There they were inches deep. He followed them once more to the path, and by some careful work separated those made at the time of the murder from the other and older marks.

He straightened up and took the lantern from Lizzie.

"You may go back now," he said. "I'm going to see Uncle Joel and Lance Trilby. Don't say anything to anyone about this . . . By the way, did Miss Cynthia wear any jewelry? Rings, for instance?"

"No, sir. Nothing but an old gold locket her mother left. She didn't care much about jewelry."

"Thanks, Lizzie," Allen said. "Keep quiet about this now."

Allen hurried to the Trilby house. He heard voices from the room in which Mark had been found dead and proceeded silently up the staircase to the second floor. He located an upstairs telephone and dialed a number.

"Doc Brady," he said, when he got an answer, "this is Allen Kent. Did you examine Mark's body yet?"

"Sure did. It was heart trouble all right. Bad case of it."

"Cynthia's corpse is there?" Allen asked, and got an affirmative answer. "Doc, take a look at her fingers. Tell me if there are any marks that might have been left by a ring? . . . Oh, you noticed that already. On the third finger of the left hand. Thanks, Doc . . . You heard about Fred Carlton, of course."

"It's a regular field day," Brady said wryly. "No question there. He killed himself."

"Oh no he didn't, Doc," Allen said. "He was murdered. Tell you about it a little later. Things to do now."

Allen made his way quietly down the stairs and out of the house, returning to Cynthia Lawlor's barn. He lit the lantern he still carried and closed the doors. Then he made a rigid examination of the smashed buggy.

He was especially interested in the wheels. Two were missing. Apparently they had come off the buggy during its mad dive down the cliff. The wheels that were still there had some deep, rusted marks on the nuts. Peculiar marks, made by a peculiar wrench.

His next stop was at the garage behind the Trilby home, and then the cellar of that house. When he finally was ready to enter the house, he first made his way to the path between the two dwellings and, whistling loudly, announced his coming.

Joel let him in. Lance Trilby was still badly affected by his brother's death and the murder of Cynthia.

"Here is what I learned," Allen said. "Lance, you'll have to verify some of these things. First of all, Cynthia left her estate to Mark. In the event of his death, the estate went to her cousin, who also is now dead. Why didn't she leave it to you if Mark died?"

Lance shrugged. "Why me? I've got plenty of money. I get Mark's estate, of course."

"Ah—so. I appreciate your help, Lance. It seems to me that the probable murderer is George Frescott. By agreement with Fred Carlton he came into Carlton's money—if there was any. Frescott could have murdered Cynthia Lawlor. Automatically then the money went to Fred. He then killed Fred, or drove him to suicide. Frescott stands to make a handsome profit."

"And my brother?" Lance asked. "Where does he come in?"

"I think your brother made one of his usual trips over to Miss Lawlor's. Perhaps she phoned and told him she was in danger. He rolled his wheel-chair off the path, stopped it outside that low window, but by the time he got there she was dead. Mark's heart was bad. He managed to roll back to this house and get to his room—but died before he could get help. There is no other solution."

"Then George Frescott is the killer?" Lance demanded. "Joel, you'd better lock him up while I can still retain my temper. I won't be responsible if you don't!"

Joel nodded. "I'll pick him up right away. Man alive, ain't Allen something though? Better'n the F.B.I., he is. Shows what training will do for a man. I pity the spies who try to outwit him."

JOEL hurried away. Allen sat down wearily.

"Uncle Joel thinks more of my abilities than I do," he said. "Lance, one thing worries me. Something was stolen from Cynthia Lawlor's house. I don't know what. It was in a metal box and no one ever saw the contents of that box. Do you think it could have been some sentimental object, and that perhaps Mark took it, before he died?"

Lance looked puzzled. "Some mysterious object in a metal box? I never heard of such a thing. Naturally I'll look."

Allen nodded. "I think you should. There may be trouble about it if she listed whatever it is in her will. Maybe someone else ought to search the premises, and you stay out of it. After all, you're Mark's brother."

"Anything you say," Lance agreed. "What's your idea?"

"Uncle Joel and I will search in the morning," Allen said. "That will keep people from

talking. Now you've had enough for one night, and so have I. I'm going to Uncle Joel's house. Call me there if you need me."

"All right." Lance offered his hand. "I don't know much about your abilities, Allen. Your uncle seems to think you're Sherlock Holmes, Charlie Chan and Philo Vance all rolled into one. Maybe you are, but I'm grateful that Joel is so convinced. He hasn't called in the State Police. They'd have torn the place apart. Me too, probably. Good night. I'll see you in the morning."

Allen departed, went back to the Lawlor house and got into the car which he had borrowed from George Frescott. He drove to town, stopping at the first drug-store he came to. There he entered a phone booth and called the hospital at Vanceton.

In answer to his inquiries he was referred to two doctors, now retired from practise. He called them, asked questions, and got answers that were satisfactory. Then he telephoned the town clerk in Vanceton and convinced him of the importance of going to his office to check certain records and call Allen back.

When the town clerk called back, he reached Allen at Joel's office. Allen did a lot of listening. Then he turned to face his uncle.

"Uncle Joel," he said, "Fred Carlton was murdered. I can prove that by measurements. The length of the rope, his height, and the height of the box when added together have a certain lapse of a couple of inches. Unless he stood on thin air, Fred didn't adjust that noose. He was lifted by the rope after it was tied around his neck. I have all the measurements."

"So you even solved that!" Joel marveled. "You're better'n I had a right to expect, Allen. Such training you've had! I locked up Frescott. He was dead drunk when I found him. No need to try and question him until morning."

"And no need then," Allen said. "He didn't kill Cynthia Lawlor. Lance Trilby did. Lance also killed Fred Carlton, her cousin, because Fred knew too much about a missing picture and something Cynthia kept locked in a metal box. Maybe Fred even knew about the buggy."

"What buggy? Say, Allen—you're making a mistake. It couldn't have been Lance. He was in love with Cynthia. Had been for years and years."

"I mean the buggy in which Mark Trilby was riding when he was crippled," Allen said. "Look, Uncle Joel—Cynthia Lawlor had that buggy removed from the bottom of the cliff and placed in her barn. She kept it all these years. There must have been a reason and I found it. Someone had loosened the wheel nuts. That wreck wasn't an accident. Whoever did it used a wrench that left unique marks. I found the wrench—old and rusted now, but it still has teeth we can prove made the marks—in Lance Trilby's tool chest. He tried to kill his brother and Cynthia too."

"It's hard to believe," Joel said slowly. "I tell you he loved Cynthia."

"Sure he did, but love turns to hate sometimes—when it's spurned. Here is what happened. I can prove it by records. Cynthia and Mark left that day to get married. Lance knew it and rigged the buggy to kill them. He failed. Cynthia may have suspected. Mark never did. Cynthia married Mark anyway, while he was in the hospital. They thought he was going to die. Everything was kept secret.

"Mark was proud. He refused to allow Cynthia to be his wife, even after they were married. He didn't want her sympathy. Therefore, she remained in her own home and he in his. But Cynthia dreamed plenty. She had the marriage license framed and hung it in her bedroom by night. She also wore the wedding ring while she slept. To insure the fact that nobody would see this, she double-locked the door and windows. She hid the license and kept the ring in a metal box. Both are gone. Lance took them after he killed her."

"But how—why?" Joel asked in awe.

HIS nephew leaned forward to tell his theory.

"Here is just what happened, Uncle Joel. Mark died a natural death. His heart gave out. Lance hasn't any too much money, I expect, but with what Mark left, he'd be well off. But Mark was married, and he left no will. His estate would go to Cynthia if she wanted to step forward and admit her marriage. That couldn't be.

"So Lance determined to kill her, make it look as if Fred Carlton did it, then murdered Carlton in such a way as to resemble suicide. He nearly succeeded. Lance lifted his dead brother out of the wheel-chair, got in it himself and rolled up to Cynthia's window. He shot her, then climbed through the window and got the marriage license and the ring.

"He left the house as he had entered—through the window—and never set foot on the ground. He didn't have to with the wheel chair there. But the marks of the chair gave him away. Lance isn't heavy, but if Mark had occupied that chair with his nearly three hundred pounds, the marks would have been very deep in the soft ground. Don't you see?"

"But—but why did Cynthia telephone me, then?"

"That is problematical," Allen said. "It might be explained this way. Mark knew he was dying and telephoned her. She realized then that Lance might try to kill her. Perhaps he'd threatened to. At any rate, he did, and we'll let him prove it by driving back

and watching his house. We'd better hurry."

They accosted Doc Brady who happened to come by and took him along. The three men left the car, approached the house carefully and secreted themselves behind it. Allen was worried for fear that they were too late, but he reasoned that Lance would bide his time, would wait until just before dawn to hide the telltale evidence.

They waited an hour before the back door opened and Lance came out. He had a shovel over one shoulder and carried something in his other hand. Allen crawled forward slowly and suddenly jumped into the middle of the path.

"Going on a burying expedition, Lance?" he asked. "You'll have to bury the marriage license of your brother and Cynthia pretty deep—also her wedding ring—and even then it won't do much good. The marriage is on record at Vanceton. You murdered Cynthia to get the money your brother left. Fred Carlton was an excellent stooge and suspect. Killing him and making it look like suicide might have fooled Uncle Joel so completely he would have closed the case."

Lance suddenly dropped the metal box and the framed license. He swung the shovel and it whizzed over Allen's head. Two fists crashed into Lance's middle. He shouted in pain and brought the shovel down again. The blow struck Allen on one shoulder, but it was a glancing blow and he still packed plenty of steam in his punches.

Lance dropped the shovel and began fighting. For his age, he was strong and able. Allen wondered if he had tackled the wrong man.

Punches to the face drove Allen back a couple of steps. He tripped over something, lurched to one side and fell to his knees. Lance utttered a cry of triumph and came in for the kill. Behind him a small figure bobbed up. A gun butt was raised and crunched down against Lance's skull. The killer went flat on his face and Constable Joel Kent chuckled in glee.

"That's how they do it in the movies. Works too. I guess we got him, Allen. Can you imagine? Cynthia probably never told Mark that his own brother had fixed that buggy to kill the pair of them. It would have busted Mark's heart sure if he had known the truth, so she kept it a secret, making crippled Mark's life happier."

Allen nodded. "You said something about Cynthia Lawlor which was particularly true, Uncle Joel. She was a lovely lady."

Doc Brady grasped Allen's arm and pulled him away while Joel affixed huge handcuffs around Lance's wrists.

"I've been thinking about you, Allen," Doc said. "This Military Intelligence stuff. I didn't think that they had trained you as a detective."

"Shh!" Allen said softly. "Don't let Uncle Joel know. Ever since I got into the Service I've been a clerk. My gun has been a typewriter, ever since they found I knew how to type well. For two years I've tried to get into active service. They didn't train me for anything much after my basic. Last week I was transferred to combat and I go overseas when this furlough is up. Please keep it mum. I wouldn't want Uncle Joel to know."

"But why not?" Doc asked. "You just do your duty in the Army. Do as you're told."

"Sure, but Uncle Joel thinks I'm a hero of some kind. Let him. It makes him feel good. The fact is, Doc, they're sending a WAC to take the job I held for two years. That's a heck of a record for a fighting man."

■

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Adv.

The Luger was flashing fire, its reports blending with the revolver.

UNFIT FOR FURTHER COMBAT

By EMIL J. KRUKAR

Wounded veteran Jim Landon hitches a ride to his home town and runs smack into a grim and deadly gun-blasting welcome!

EX-MILITARY Policeman Jim Landon paid the cab driver, watched as the tail lights disappeared back down the highway toward town, and then limped over into a better position under the cross section traffic light. He put down his small zipper bag and lit a cigarette.

There hadn't been any use waiting four hours for the next train to Cherno when he could get out here on the highway and make that forty miles in an hour or so.

It was enough past dusk that the lights were showing up bright and glaring on the sizable stream of traffic that flowed past. But the drivers all appeared to be in a big hurry. Landon waited another half hour, shifting most of his weight to his good leg. That other one wasn't going to be of much use on a police run for quite some time yet. Which was all right too. Three years had been a devil of a long time. He was going to loaf in the Eighty-Third Precinct with the boys and take life easy until the calf that had stopped a burst of machine-gun fire from a German MG 34 got back into shape.

A few trucks had begun to roll through; big fellows with long, heavily loaded, semi-trailer bodies. Presently, when none stopped, Landon picked up his bag. He didn't like to do it, but he stepped up close as a big red job

eased up to a halt and waited for the light to change. Inside the darkened cab a man's face peered down, but he shook his head.

"Can't do it, sergeant," he half growled. "Insurance regulations."

"My name's Jim Landon," the ex-policeman said. "I'm only going to Cherno, forty miles down the road. There shouldn't be any company spotters out at this time of night."

The driver started to shake his head again, then suddenly leaned closer. In that moment Landon recognized him. And the big-shouldered man back of the wheel seemed to have a long memory too, for he reached out and opened the right-hand door. Landon got in.

The light changed. The truck eased through, changed to a higher-pitched key on the gears, gaining speed. The driver was looking stonily straight ahead.

"Well, Reed, it's a small world," Landon remarked, grinning thinly to himself in the darkened interior. "Whoever thought a cop would be out hitching a ride from one of Ralph Baxter's boys?"

Joe Reed turned. His face was sullen, and, it seemed to Landon, a little uneasy.

"Listen," the driver said in a hard voice. "I woulda probably give in and picked you up anyhow, but lay off the Baxter stuff, brother. I'm with Morton Trucking now. I got a good job. Suppose we let it ride at that."

"Fair enough," Landon replied.

Maybe the man was on the level. But Reed had made a lot of threats the last night he had been hauled in on a raid in one of Baxter's dives, and Landon unconsciously shifted the zipper bag over on his knees. The Luger in there was a good one and the German Unteroffizier to whom it had been issued wouldn't be needing it any more.

"By the way," he went on, "how is Baxter? The boys from the precinct write he's been doing all right for himself. Has a big place out on the highway near the plant. Everything from gambling to liquor."

Reed kept his eyes glued to the road.

"Bax is doing okay, I reckon," he said from the side of his mouth.

"I presume that Tony Garino and Blue Eyes are still around?"

"They're still around," Joe Reed answered. "You going out to visit them?"

"I probably will," Landon said, grinning a little at that one. "But not for awhile. Not until this leg gets a little better."

As a strong arm trio working for Baxter, Reed, Garino, and the blue-eyed little psychopathic killer of that funny name had been a tough combination.

"Discharged, eh?" queried the truck driver.

"That's it. I wasn't much good directing traffic and handling PW's after they left a machine-gunner in a wrecked building right in the middle of a little Luxembourg town and he got three of us. Anyhow, Reed, if you're on the level about this trucking job, we'll square all accounts and start over. That doesn't go for Garino and Blue Eyes. I'm still a cop—I always will be."

"The job is on the level. But I did ninety days for vag on that last pickup. I was pretty sore."

"As I recall," Landon said musingly, "you weren't exactly happy."

THEY were rolling down a gentle declivity and the dim lights on the dash showed the big vehicle to be hitting sixty. Reed seemed to be in a hurry. Landon broached the question.

Reed nodded.

"I'm in a devil of a hurry," he said, his tone surly. "I've got three hundred and sixty cases of liquor in the back end of this crate and there's been a lot of black market hi-jacking lately. Morton is worried. We handle all the stuff for Federated Distilleries and the insurance outfits are on the job. Spotters everywhere. But you being a soldier and a cop from Cherno might make a difference. So they discharged you?"

"Unfit for further combat," Landon volunteered and lapsed into silence.

He was a little puzzled. Something didn't jell just right. Was it possible that Reed, going straight, was having pressure put on him by his old friends? He looked at the big-shouldered man beside him. The question was on his lips when the side road showed up, a dirt road that forked off in such a manner that Reed took it without his foot leaving the accelerator.

"Detour around through Maple Crossing," Reed explained.

"Why?" Landon asked.

"I told you there's been trouble. Boss' orders. I slipped out of town with this load. Didn't even pick it up at the distillery. We loaded from an old warehouse."

The tension that had affected Landon dissolved and he settled back again. He was a little too jumpy. Relax, soldier, he thought. Take it easy. You've been ducking too many German high explosives.

Reed tooled the big machine for five miles until the flat country fell behind and the treeless expanse roughened up, timber showing up in dark masses on either side. Reed shifted again and again, easing the big red machine over the roughening roads. Then, at a corner, he slowed down again. For a moment Landon thought he was going through. Instead the man braked to a stop.

Too late Landon saw the gun. He saw it as, out of nowhere, came dark forms moving toward the truck. The low outlines of a parked sedan showed up beyond them. Jim Landon wheeled to face Joe Reed. He could see the man's face plainly now and in it was an open triumph filled with malignant hatred.

"This is the end of the line for you, little soldier boy," came in a brittle, half-gritted

voice. "So you were the copper who was going to put Bax out of business? He'll be glad to know. There he is now."

A man opened the door. A hooded flashlight gleamed and cut its beam across Landon's face. It started away, swung back, and a startled voice—the voice of Tony Garino—came with an oath.

"Now ain't this something!" it said.

"Surprised, eh, Tony?" chuckled Joe Reed. "Yep, it's our old friend, Detective Jim Landon, home with his little Purple Heart. He's actually been in danger! And now he's been discharged to come home where it's safe. Unfit for further combat duty, he says."

Reed was laughing as Landon stepped slowly down from the truck. Another man came up; a man who was small and wiry and who, in daylight, would blink with a pair of baby innocent blue eyes. Blue Eyes.

"Well, well," he exclaimed in a curiously high-pitched voice. "Hey! Bax, look who Reed's got."

Another light swung to Landon's face, steadied, then went out. It blinded him, and he was unprepared for the sudden blow that came from Baxter's fists. He reeled back against the truck's high front fender.

"Now that ain't polite, Boss," Reed said. "He's a hero. And he's still a cop. You just shouldn't be hitting cops like that. There's a city ordinance against it."

Baxter ignored the gibe and stepped up close. Landon's sight had adjusted itself again. It pushed back the darkness far enough to see a face that had grown a little fuller and a midriff that bulged out a little more.

"What are we going to do with him, Bax?" Tony Garino asked.

"He's my job," put in the shriller voice of Blue Eyes. "He's—"

"You guys are kind of forgetting that I'm the bird who picked him up," cut in Joe Reed. "I'm the bird who did ninety days on a vag charge just before this copper went into the Army three years ago."

"Shut up—all of you!" Baxter ordered. "We've got to get this liquor out of here fast. We'll take care of Landon later. Tony, get down there and get the boys in the other truck here. We've got to switch loads and get out of here before Morton's spotters get suspicious and start hunting Reed."

Garino turned and disappeared into the darkness. Reed went around to the rear of his truck and began working at the back doors. Only little Blue Eyes, he of the dark skin and small body, remained close. He had, it appeared, been promoted. Probably Baxter's body-guard by now. Blue Eyes stood almost in front of Landon, his hand in the side pocket of his coat. Even in the darkness Landon could feel the penetrating glare of those queerly colored orbs.

"I don't like you, mister," Blue Eyes shrilled. "You hear? I don't like you and I'm gonna leave your cop carcass right in the middle of this road—"

"Shut up," Baxter cut in. Then to Landon, "Just like old home week, eh?"

"That," Landon said, "is practically what I told Joe. He sure had me fooled about the Honest John business. I thought he might have broken away from his brother rats. Mind if I smoke?"

"No lights," snapped Baxter. "These flashlights are bad enough."

"If it wouldn't be too impolite to ask, where do we go from here?"

"You're going in on this load of hi-jacked liquor," came the reply. "I've got a cellar down under one of my joints out near the aircraft plant. A cellar under a place called the Alamo that has a lot of liquor with no Federal Tax stamps on it. We're going to dig you a nice hole down there and dump what's left of you in it. We're going to carry that cop carcass of yours in in a tarp and nobody will ever know what happened to the man who started home from the Army and never got there. It's a small debt I owe you and some of your pals down at the Eighty-Third Precinct."

"Just a boy scout at heart," Landon said dryly in the darkness.

"A regular comedian, I am," Baxter grunted in reply. "Except when it comes to cops. Now you stand very still, Landon, while we get this stuff switched. As soon as we do Reed can take off and then give us time to make town before putting up his squawk by telephone. He'll tell them a nice story about eight or nine men he never saw before hi-jacking his load. And because he hasn't been in my place or spoken to one of the boys in public in nearly two years the cops can't pin a thing on him. Well, here comes the truck."

Garino had shown up, looming tall in the night. Beyond him a heavy truck motor was seemingly feeling its blind way out from among the trees lining the side of the road ahead. Reed came back.

"We've got to snap it up in a hurry," he said. "There's three hundred and sixty cases to make with."

"You heard what I said," Blue Eyes cut in again, as though he couldn't get it out of his mind. "I don't like you, copper. You—"

LANDON had shifted the zipper bag around under his left arm. There was a tab on it that would snap open the zipper but he hadn't been able to find it. He stood there waiting for them to make the first move. And with Blue Eyes standing there with that night-hidden, baleful stare, this was hardly the time for fumbling.

Then Blue Eyes said the words, impatiently, to Baxter.

"Listen, Boss, we ain't doin' nobody no good with this flat-foot standing here. If

we're gonna put him on the bottom, under the liquor cases, we got to—"

"That's what we got to do," Tony Garino agreed.

Baxter turned. By now Landon's eyes were so accustomed to the darkness that he could see each play of the fat man's features. What the ex-military policeman saw there now was the ominous calm of a man about to order death.

"All right, Landon," Baxter snapped. "Just go right around back of the truck. This is it."

Blue Eyes came in close, his hand out of his pocket now and gripping his gun.

"Easy does it now," he said, in a shrill voice.

Suddenly, lightning like, something drove hard at his chin.

Landon had smashed his knee-cap with a toe, while his left hand, edgewise and stiff, flashed down and out. It struck Blue Eyes' gun wrist and Landon twisted aside as the weapon spouted flame, fired by a finger jerked in reflexed pain. Blue Eyes had gone down before a man who had learned all the tricks of the game in more than two years overseas under fire.

The little killer's gun wasn't where Landon had thought it was. Something like an inner curse went out of him as he swept his hand along the ground and struck only the zipper bag. He was rolling toward the front wheel and around it when flame lashed out and Garino's face was lit up by the explosions of his own automatic. Suddenly Landon's fingers snapped at the end of the bag and the most welcome object he had ever touched caught between his thumb and forefinger. The tab on the zipper! He was snapping it open, and then the Luger was out, lashing fire, its queer, foreign reports blending with the automatic.

Almost above him, Garino doubled up and then fell forward to lie kicking. Blue Eyes let out a scream. It was more animal than human and it was neither fear nor rage. It seemed to be more of frustration—until he got hold of his lost gun and screamed again.

He was on the ground, four feet away from Landon, when the Luger's slugs drove into him and rolled him back.

Landon staggered up. He saw Baxter running toward the dark outlines of the car and then he saw Reed. He wasn't to find out until a moment later that Reed had left his gun in the seat of the cab. His first shot broke the hulking truck driver's arm and the high velocity of the bullet possessed enough shocking power to knock him down. Landon left him and made for Ralph Baxter, who was trying to get open the door of the car.

THE ex-MP had a sudden desire to laugh. Here was Baxter, who had boasted that he was too wise to carry a gun, and limping Jim Landon carrying a German officer's Luger that was now empty!

But he got the man, taking a couple of minutes to get back into practice with some of the dirty fighting he had been taught in combat training. He could afford to take his time now, because the darkened truck coming out of the trees had fled into the night, and Joe Reed still lay against his own truck with a bullet-shattered arm.

So Landon took his time, and when he got through Baxter was in no further condition for flight.

He got the man over to the truck and let him slump down while he used some more Army stuff to give first aid to Reed. Ten minutes later Baxter and what was left of his strong-arm men were locked in the back, and the big red truck was rolling on toward Cherno and the Eighty-Third Street Precinct.

Under the wheel, Landon grinned a little in spite of the pain in his leg. He grinned the harder when, through the square hole back of him, came the cursing voice of Joe Reed.

"What did you say?" he asked, in answer to a question by Baxter.

"I said how come you had this copper with you?"

"Picked him up a few miles back when I recognized him. I figured it would be a good chance to square things when he said he'd been discharged as unfit for further combat."

Landon grinned and drove on. Maybe he wouldn't have to wait too long after all to get back on a police car.

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Something hit Parks just as every light in the room went out

TWO BIRDS, ONE STONE

By ROBERT SIDNEY BOWEN

Detective Sergeant Dan Parks played tricks as a hobby, but it was no joke when he rounded up a pair of jewel thieves!

LIEUTENANT PHIL PARKS, Chief of Detectives, hung up the phone and groaned softly. He reached out a hand and snapped up the switch of the inter-office phone.

"Is Sergeant Parks out there?" he asked.

"Right, Lieutenant," the voice came out of the box in reply. "You want him?"

"Yes, send him in. He flipped down the switch.

A moment or two later the door opened to admit a good-looking, blond-haired man in his late twenties. Save for the color of his hair, and the infectious grin that seemed to light up his whole face, he was almost a dead ringer for his older brother seated behind the huge desk.

As he entered he lifted one hand holding a playing card between the tips of his third and fourth fingers. "Look, Phil, this is good," he said. "I've just got the hang."

And with those words he proceeded to wave and twist his hand about making the card disappear at will into thin air, and then reappear again. He did it with an amazing display of speed that brought a faint expression of admiration into Phil Parks' normally

[*Turn to Page 84*]

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wooden face. For only an instant, however. Then the expression was gone and the chief was speaking in sharp exasperation.

"Stop it, Dan!" he said. "Why don't you grow up and cut out all that hokus-pokus stuff? You just make yourself look silly, that's all. You're a detective, third grade, not a . . . Or are you?"

Dan Parks slipped the playing card into a pocket of his civilian clothes and then sank into a near-by chair.

"Why, I'm both, Phil," he said with his easy grin. "Didn't you know? Being one helps me be the other. See what I mean? Mind and muscle coordination. That sort of thing. What do you want to see me about, Phil?"

His older brother opened his mouth as though to say something, but suddenly seemed to change his mind. He glanced down at some notes he had made on the pad a few moments ago.

"Mr. and Mrs. John T. Hampton are giving a War Relief dinner tomorrow night," he said in a flat voice.

The shadow of a frown passed across young Dan Parks' face.

"What, again?" he demanded. "What are they doing, looking for trouble? Or aren't they? . . ." He let the rest go with a wave of one hand.

His brother sighed and nodded.

"They are," he said. "The Hampton collection of Hapsburg jewels will be on display again. The affair this time is hooked up some way with Austrian refugee relief, or something, so of course the collection will be on display."

"But look, Phil," young Dan said, "that's a private affair for the insurance company, not the Police Department."

"You know perfectly well why we have to handle it," said Phil Parks. "And the reason is that John T. Hampton is a personal friend of the Commissioner's. The Commisioner was on the phone a few moments ago. Not Hampton. I got my orders, and you're elected, Dan."

"But why me? I hate that kind of blow-out. And twice already I've had to ride herd on that mess of junk.

"Junk, maybe," the detective chief said with a shrug, "but many thousand dollars' worth of it. And you are elected, as usual, because you are the only one in the Department who still doesn't look like a cop in dinner clothes. You and Maloney. You'll take him along. It's tomorrow night. You and Maloney will get your cards of admission in the morning. Be there by six, and keep your eyes really skinned this time."

Dan Parks' eyes gleamed. He looked at his brother hard.

"What do you mean, really skinned this time?" he asked.

Phil Parks shrugged and began to toy with a pencil on his desk.

"It could be I don't mean a thing," he said slowly. "Yet, I don't know. The pieces of that Hapsburg collection could be very tempting to certain characters. Particularly, that Prince John diamond. And the war has made this city a Mecca for characters we don't like."

"Anybody in particular?" Dan wanted to know.

"Nothing certain. But I've heard rumors that one or two of them have filtered back from the hinterlands. You know them all by sight. That's another reason why I'm electing you."

SERGEANT PARKS nodded as though he only half heard. He had pulled a clean handkerchief from his pocket and was unfolding it. He reached out a hand and grinned.

"Let me have that pencil a moment, Phil?" he said.

His brother handed it over without thinking, and Dan immediately wrapped the unfolded handkerchief about it.

"Look, Phil." And with that he began twisting and turning the handkerchief between his two hands.

There was the muffled sound of wood cracking and splintering inside the handkerchief. Phil Parks turned red and started up out of his chair.

"Relax, Phil." Dan stopped him and shook out the handkerchief. "It's okay, see?"

It was, too. The very same pencil Phil Parks had been toying with only a moment ago dropped down onto the desk top quite undamaged.

"Neat?" Dan grinned at his brother's red face. "Thought it was a goner, eh?"

The older Parks licked his lips and swallowed hard. He gave the pencil only a passing glance before he fixed angry eyes on his kid brother's face.

"You and your confounded hokus-pokus!" he rasped. "No wonder you're as far away from a recommendation for second grade as you ever were. You don't seem to have brains enough to keep your mind on the real job. No, I'm wrong. You have got brains, good ones, but you just don't know how to use them to your best advantage. I—Look, Dan, maybe I'll make a deal with you."

"What's the deal?"

"Throw that magic stuff out the window and really buckle down to your job for a month, and maybe I'll see that a second grade recommendation goes through for you," Phil said. "That hokus-pokus is . . . Or have you some cracked idea about going on the stage with it?"

Dan laughed, shook his head.

"Not me," he said. "I don't like tomatoes, ripe or not ripe. No, I just like to play around with it, Phil. Call it a hobby. And

call the deal off, too, fellow. If and when I make second grade, I'll do it on my own. Well, anything else?"

Phil Parks stared at him hard for a moment, then sighed.

"No, that's all," he said. "But, I wish you'd get some sense."

"I get more and more of it every day, Phil," young Dan said as he rose and headed for the door. "Okay, Lieutenant. I'll watch that junk as it has never been watched before. . . ."

The John T. Hampton home was in the ultra fashionable section of the city. By seven o'clock the cars were parked bumper to bumper for a block and a half in all directions. And by seven o'clock, also, Dan Parks thoroughly regretted the fact that he was the only man on the Force who still didn't look like a cop when he was in evening clothes.

The Hapsburg collection that he had kept an eye on twice before was more than ever a mess af junk, as far as he was concerned. Personally, he wouldn't give five dollars for the lot. That is, save for the Prince John diamond that was displayed in the very center of the collection atop a little blue velvet pedestal. In size the diamond was about as big as one's little finger-nail, but it was not the gem's size that impressed you. It was its flawlessness and the rainbow of colors it threw off in all directions.

However, by seven o'clock Dan was thoroughly sick of the sight of the diamond, too. And he was sick of the sweet young things, and the bedecked old hags that O-oh-ed, and A-ah-ed as they gathered about the table in the center of the room. A railing held the oglers at a comparatively safe distance, but not actually far enough back for anyone who really had ideas. Hence the reason why Dan hovered ever close, and why Sergeant Maloney wandered about the room with both eyes wide open.

What actually depressed Dan most, though was not his job, but the set of people there. Mr. and Mrs. Hampton were all right in his book, but not so their "guests." And that was the point. They were a very crummy lot. It seemed as though anybody who could spell the name "Austria," and owned evening clothes had been admitted. Not an interesting face in the lot. In fact, not so much as a single face that he had ever seen before.

At around seven thirty, though, things took a change as far as his interest was concerned. A very decided change, and for a moment or two he simply could not believe his eyes. Two seconds after the tall, dark-eyed, black-haired man had entered the room and was moving over toward the Hamptons at the head of the receiving line, the file index of faces and facts in Dan's brain popped up

[Turn Page]

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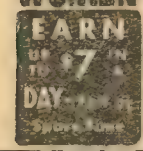

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the right card and gave him all the information he needed.

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Well, there he was in the flesh, and bending low over Mrs. Hampton's hand. A little tingle rippled up and down Dan Parks' spine, and suddenly that reception room became a very interesting place to be. That is, of course, unless Dude was a very respectable citizen these days, which was quite a lot to ask.

DAN glanced at the Prince John diamond, and then back at Dude accepting a cocktail from a pretty maid with a tray full of them. He thought a moment, then moved away from the table.

It didn't take long at all, though to all appearances Dude Farnsworth seemed very casual and nonchalant about it. He came up close to the railing and stared long and intently at the display. Dan moved to a point just behind the tall man.

"Mustn't touch, you know, Dude," he said in a low and pleasant voice.

The stiffening of the other's back was barely perceptible. Then he turned slowly around, flashed his black eyes across Dan's face, and smiled warmly.

"Hello, Parks," he said in a smooth, cultured voice. "It's good to see you after all these years. How is your brother? Commissioner, yet?"

"Not yet," said Dan, grinning back at him. "But what brings you here, Dude? Interested in the future Austria, if any? Or shall we guess?"

The tall man smiled easily, took out a cigarette case and offered one to Dan, who refused.

"You're unkind, Parks," he said, and the smile went out of his eyes. "I'm as honest as you and your brother. Have been for years. Always have been, as far as that goes. No, I met the Hamptons out west a year or two ago. Tonight I'm simply acting on their invitation to visit them, if I ever came east again. No, Parks. Sorry. Frankly, I think most of it is fake, anyway. So don't worry."

"Who's worrying?" Parks chuckled. "You've just told me that you're an honest citizen these days. Funny, but I'm kind of sorry to learn that, Dude. I've always had a little secret hope that one day I'd get you cold. Just for old time's sake, you know."

Farnsworth's smile, through the smoke of his cigarette, didn't hold so much as a shadow of malice.

"That would take a very smart man, Parks," he said, then added with an arched eyebrow, "you know?"

"Well, the old quick tongue hasn't changed, anyway," Parks said and laughed with him. "But these really aren't fake, and you know it, Dude. I was just watching you stare at them, and I could tell that you knew. Now, take this little item, for instance."

As Dan spoke he leaned over the railing and deliberately picked up the Prince John diamond. He held it nestled in the palm of his hand so that Farnsworth could see it closely.

"A fake, Dude?" he asked softly, a grin still on his lips.

But the tall man hardly glanced at the diamond. He looked at the detective with an amused expression.

"Tempting me, or looking for a bet, Parks?"

"Neither," Dan told him. "Just letting you have a special look at something you must leave strictly alone. Like all honest citizens should, Dude."

Farnsworth's attention had wandered past Parks. He was staring behind the detective with a combined look of amazement and smouldering rage in his eyes. Parks turned quickly but all he saw was a group of men and women chatting together over near the entrance. Not a single face in the group meant anything to him. When he turned back again, the expression was gone from Dude Farnsworth's face, and he was smiling easily once more.

"Thanks, Parks," he said. "For the warning, I mean. But like I said, don't worry. Well, it's been nice."

"It's been dandy," Parks grunted, and leaned over to place the diamond back on its pedestal.

Dude Farnsworth gave him a parting smile, and sauntered off. Parks looked after him for a moment, then searched the gathering for Maloney. He caught his eye and wig-wagged him over.

"Yeah, Dan?" Maloney grunted when he got there.

"That tall lad who just walked away from me," Parks said in a low voice that just barely reached the other's ears. "The one now taking a cocktail. An old friend, Ma-

[Turn Page]

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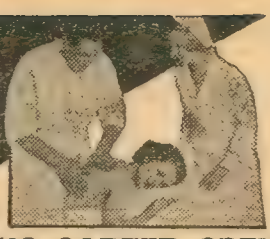

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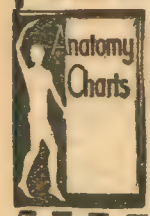

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loney. Dude Farnsworth. One of the cleverer kind."

"No!" Maloney gasped. Then quickly, "I thought there was something about his face when I saw him come in. The Dude, huh?"

"In person," Parks said gravely. "And look, Maloney, be glue to him from now on. No matter what happens, stick with that chump. I don't go for hunches, but every now and then I get one that clicks. You stay right with him until I whistle you off, or this shindig ends and we go back. Got it?"

"Wrapped and tied, Dan," Maloney assured him and moved away.

Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five minutes ticked by, and Dan Parks was trying to convince himself that the peculiar feeling he had was only the aftermath of something he had eaten. Dude Farnsworth drifted by a dozen or more times, but the tall dark-haired man ignored him and the jewel collection as well. As a matter of fact, very few people came near the display during that time, with the result that Parks felt just about as conspicuous as he did when sitting behind the wheel of a prowl car.

AND then on the dot of eight, it happened! Deciding that one more cocktail wouldn't harm or help anything, Parks was just in the act of taking one from the maid's tray when suddenly there was a sharp hissing sound close by, and every light in the room went out.

Movement came fast and furious. A ramrod hit him in the stomach and then in the chest. He staggered back and his eardrums were split by the maid's piercing scream. He tripped and fell to the floor, and before he could so much as begin to pick himself up he was deluged by a shower of cocktails and cocktail glasses.

Cursing and gasping he heaved up onto his feet, jerked out his pocket flash and snapped on the beam. By intent or by accident the beam of light cut the darkness straight to the little blue velvet cushion. There was no diamond on top of it now.

By then the whole room was a bedlam of sound. Some people were yelling in alarm, and others were yelling for silence and candles. In a few moments, wall tapers until now used only for decoration were touched into flickering flame.

Much of the bedlam subsided with the coming of the candle light. In one sweeping glance Parks took in three outstanding items, all of which added to the baffled rage mounting within him.

First he saw the cause of the blackout. Not fifteen feet away was a table with a pink-shaded three-bulb lamp. One of the bulbs was missing and a small silver serving knife was sticking up out of the socket. A short-

circuit, a blown fuse down in the basement, and out had gone all the lights.

Then Parks noted Dude Farnsworth standing way over on the far side of the room. His black eyes were fixed rigidly on the Hapsburg display, and angry incredulity was stamped all over his face.

Lastly, the detective saw the open French windows leading onto a terrace.

Even as he noted the avenue of escape he set himself in motion and went racing past staring couples to the open window. The scented warmth of a summer night greeted him when he stepped out onto the stone terrace, but he was in no mood to appreciate it then.

He peered across the lawn, saw no sign of a moving shadow among the trees and shrubs. An iron fence, not too high, bordered the sidewalk some forty yards away, and he could see people sauntering along in the lovely evening. Then, as he heard a car start up from the curb a block or so away, he cursed softly and stepped back into the room.

Maloney was there to meet him, and although the man's eyes were grave, and not a little anxious, he seemed to be finding it hard to keep from grinning.

"Man, have you got liquor on you!" he said in a low voice. "What happened anyway? I took a look just now and saw that the rock in the center is gone. It wasn't Farnsworth, Dan. I was right with him, like you ordered. Who was it, and how—"

"Later," Parks said, and tried to keep the snarl out of his voice. "Get your eye back on Farnsworth, and keep it there. . . ."

He paused in sudden thought. Then his eyes narrowed as a faint bit of memory came back to him. He leaned close to Maloney, whispered something very fast, and nodded for him to be on his way.

With a very unpleasant feeling in his stomach he walked over to Mr. and Mrs. Hampton who were standing by the jewel display. Alarm and marked annoyance showed on their faces, but they were poised and calm.

"It was my fault," Dan said quietly. "Whoever it was, was too clever and too fast for me. We'll get him, though. I think I can promise you that. Do you happen to have a guest list?"

Mrs. Hampton gave Parks an apologetic smile.

"No," she said. "We simply had cards of admission made up, sent some to our personal friends, and some to the various relief agencies to be given to Austrian refugees who might care to attend. I take it that the thief has escaped? That . . . Well, that a searching of the guests will not be necessary? I'd rather not . . ."

"No search will be necessary, Mrs. Hamp-

[Turn Page]

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ton," said Parks. "Whoever did it is not in this room, now. I hope to catch up with him soon, however. If I may suggest it, I would carry on as though nothing had happened. After all, to break up things now wouldn't help anything."

They talked it over for a moment, and agreed.

"Very well, then, we shall," Mrs. Hampton said. "Besides, dinner is ready to be served anyway. Thank you, Sergeant. If you need us, please call on us. John, will you take Countess Reisner in to dinner, and we'll get started?"

Parks bowed slightly and stepped aside to let them pass. Then, as double doors at the rear end of the reception room were thrown open and the couples began moving into the banquet room, he slipped out into the hall, quickly found the phone and called the Detective Bureau.

When he returned, the blown fuse had been replaced and the reception room was a blaze of light once more. The silver knife had been taken out of the light socket and the bulb put back in. Parks went over and stared down at the silver knife, momentarily cursing himself for not having checked it for fingerprints before it had been removed. But then he was pretty sure a diamond thief would not have left his prints on such obvious places as the knife and the bulb.

THE reception room was now empty of people save for two maids who were busy clearing away the cocktail things. On impulse Parks questioned them both, but only learned what he already knew. People were milling about that table with the lamp all the time. It would have been very simple for anybody to unscrew the light bulb by degrees, and eventually create the blackout quite unnoticed.

Parks was back by the jewel display, staring at it with unseeing eyes, when his brother came striding into the room. There was thunder in Phil Parks' eyes.

"All right, Dan," he said sharply. "Let's have everything. I don't suppose you were showing somebody one of your hokus-pokus tricks, and had your back turned and—"

"You want the facts, Phil?" Dan Parks interrupted quietly. "Or shall I wait for you to finish your blistering? It was all my fault, so start from there."

His brother gave him an angry glare and then cooled off somewhat.

"All right, let's have it then," he said less sharply.

Dan gave him an account of the evening to date, and Phil Parks listened in intent silence, a frown ever deepening his brows.

"Dude Farnsworth?" he echoed when Dan was finished. "You're sure he—"

"I'm sure he didn't," Dan cut in. "He was too far away, and Maloney was right with him. Still is. In there." He indicated the

banquet room behind the now closed doors. Then he went on. "Whether Dude had ideas or not when he came here tonight, I don't know," he said. "Anyway, I played it safe by sticking Maloney on him. However, I think he recognized one of his brother rats.

"When I was talking to him he suddenly spotted somebody he didn't like. It showed all over his face. Who, I don't know. When I looked where he was looking I didn't see a face I recognized. Farnsworth acted sore, as though he'd been cheated out of something."

"Then Farnsworth must know who your man is," Phil Parks said. "Get him here, and we'll sweat the name out of him!"

"No, I'd let that ride, Phil," Dan said with a shake of his head. "You can't sweat anything out of a man like Dude. He'd just laugh and make us both look foolish. Another thing, he knows he's in the clear. I mean, he knows I know that he couldn't have done it. Let's just keep Maloney on to him. I don't think Dude knows Maloney, or that he's being tagged."

The Chief of Detectives gave his younger brother a searching look.

"You think Farnsworth will lead Maloney some place? You think somebody else did this for the Dude?"

"I don't know," said Dan, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't know what to think. But we ought to let things slide along as they are. Let the party go on, and we'll see what Maloney can do for us. I'm staying here for keeps so's Maloney can reach me by phone—if there's anything to tell me."

"Just wait, while the thief is putting miles and miles behind him?" the older Parks demanded.

"You have a better idea, Phil?" Dan asked quietly.

Phil Parks cleared his throat, but he did not come forth with a better plan. He walked around the jewel display, glaring down at it in angry disgust. Suddenly he stopped short and nodded to Dan.

"All right, then," he said. "This is your chance to make good your boast about doing it on your own. Clean this mess up and you'll get a second-grade rating. That's a promise!"

Something funny made Dan smile, and he seemed to hesitate a brief instant before he spoke.

"Fair enough, Phil," he said evenly. "A deal. I can use the extra pay, too. . . ."

A little over three hours later the Hapsburg collection was no longer on the little rail-protected table. It had been gathered up by Hampton and stowed away in his safe, where it would remain until transported to the bank vault in the morning. And the "guests" of the evening were no longer about, either. The affair had broken up a bit sooner than had originally been intended,

[Turn Page]

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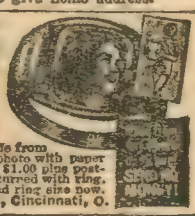

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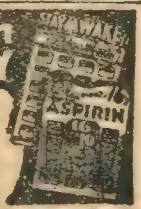

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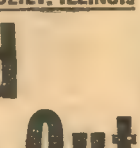

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and everybody had gone his or her way.

For an hour or more, the Hamptons, Phil Parks and his brother Dan had been seated in the library off the other side of the hall, all four of them striving to keep up a conversation that had nothing to do with what happened, while they waited for a phone call that might never come.

Of the four, Dan Parks was the least comfortable. The Hamptons, of course, had been told the reason for the waiting, but as the minutes piled up one on top of the other they seemed to become more resigned to whatever happened, good or bad. Even Phil Parks had lost a great deal of his inner anger, and threw fewer exasperated looks at his younger brother.

But with Dan, the longer they waited the more restless and agitated he became. A hundred times he looked at his wrist-watch, and a hundred times he stole quick glances at the others, licked his lips and acted as though he were about to say something.

The sudden ring of the telephone bell jarred them all into tense alertness. Dan Parks reached the phone in a single leap and swept up the instrument.

"YOU Maloney?" he barked into the mouthpiece. "What's—"

He cut himself off short, pressed the receiver tighter to his ear and listened intently, while the features of his face ran a complete gamut of expressions.

Suddenly he clapped the palm of his hand to his forehead and let out an agonizing moan.

"The old Backbay Hotel?" he cried. "Oh, dope that I am! What a fat-headed memory! Maloney! Get the elevator boy. Find out what floor, what room. Wring it out of him, and wait for me!"

He slammed the phone back into its cradle and bolted for the library door. Not bothering to explain anything to the others he dashed through the hall and out the front door in nothing flat. Once outside he saw his brother's Department car parked at the curb. He put on speed, sprinted down the gravel driveway and leaped into the front seat beside a very startled uniformed driver.

"The old Backbay Hotel, and give it everything you've got!" he snapped. "No questions! Get going!"

The driver wasn't one to quibble—and he knew Dan. He punched the starter button, slipped the car into gear and went whirling away from the curb. With the wail of the siren in his ears Dan settled back in the seat, silently cursing his inane stupidity.

The old Backbay Hotel was a normal fifteen-minute drive from the Hampton home but the police car made it in six minutes flat. They had no sooner swung in to the curb than Dan Parks was out of the car and racing through the doors into the main lobby.

Maloney was there waiting for him and

came forward at once.

"Sixth floor, Dan," he said. "Room Six-Nine-Eight. Party by the name of Evans. I just checked with the clerk. What's—?"

"Later," Dan snapped and bolted for the elevators, Maloney tagging along behind.

A wide-eyed colored operator ducked back to let them enter.

"Six, quick!" Dan ordered and jerked a thumb upward.

The operator didn't need to be told twice.

"Six-Nine-Eight is to the right, at the end of the hall," Maloney volunteered as the elevator doors slid open. "I checked that, too."

Dan nodded and went out of the car fast. As he spun right and started along the carpeted hallway he slid his hand under his dinner jacket and removed a small but very effective automatic from its shoulder holster. Gun out and legs moving, he traveled swiftly and silently to the door marked 698.

He was about to knock when he heard the muffled sound of angry voices from within. Quietly, he took hold of the doorknob with his left hand, turned it, found the door unlocked. He gave the door a violent shove, sending it back with a bang, and stepped into the room just as things began to happen.

Dude Farnsworth was standing in the middle of the room with his back to the door. There was a gun in his hand, and as he swung around, startled by the sudden bang of the door, the gun went off. The bullet hit a short and slightly bald man in evening clothes standing by a Morris chair, and it knocked him over like a ten pin.

Farnsworth fired again and the second bullet blew splinters of door jamb into Dan Parks' face. But Dan's gun spoke almost simultaneously. Invisible strings seemed to jerk Dude Farnsworth's gun hand ceilingward. The gun flew from blood-covered fingers and arced down onto the carpet several feet away. The Dude howled with pain, grabbed his mangled hand.

With Maloney covering Farnsworth, Dan went over to the short, bald-headed man writhing about on the floor. Both hands were pressed to the upper part of his chest, and blood that had already soaked through his shirt front was seeping out between his fingers. The man's eyes were glazed by terror. He raised one hand in an imploring gesture.

"I'm dying, Parks!" he gasped. "Get a doctor. I'm dying. The dog shot me. You saw it!"

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Parks nodded but no mercy showed in his face.

"So it's Easy Evans back again like a bad penny," he said. "It was a pretty good skin grafting job they did on your face, Easy, after that fire you were in. Eight years ago wasn't it? I must have noticed you at the Hampton's tonight a dozen times, and didn't tumble once. In fact, it didn't hit me until I heard Dude had come calling here at the Backbay. Your old hangout, Easy. You should have picked a new place when you came back to town. Or would Dude have known that one, too?"

"Get me a doctor, Parks!" the wounded man choked. "I'm dying, I tell you!"

"Too high for that," Dan said and stared down at the man. "Could be, though, you're bleeding to death. Where did you hide it, Easy?"

"Get a doctor!" the man begged wildly.

"First, the diamond, Easy," Parks said quietly. "Then the doctor. Where is it?"

Rage and fear battled with the man. Fear eventually won. He lifted a finger and pointed.

"Closet," he said with an effort. "Top shelf. Knothole in the right rear corner. Parks! Have mercy . . ."

BUT Dan wasn't listening any more. He had turned and was walking quickly toward the closet. He was half way there when his brother, followed by John Hampton, came barging into the room. Right behind them was a middle-aged man, who was obviously the hotel manager. Phil Parks, however, calmly closed the door in the man's face. Dan didn't see that bit of play. He was in the closet by then.

The diamond was there, stuck down in a half-filled knothole. Dan lifted it out, walked back into the room and over to Hampton.

"Here it is, sir," he said and dropped the gem into his hand.

"Spendid, Sergeant, wonderful!" Hampton breathed in relief. "But, how in the world did—" He stopped short, squinted hard at the stone, and then looked at Dan Parks. "This isn't the Prince John!" he gasped. "I know something about that stone. This isn't it, I'm positive. It's a beautiful fake, but not the Prince John!"

A brief instant of stunned silence settled over the room. Even "Easy" Evans stopped groaning, and tried to prop himself up on one elbow. Dan Parks smiled.

"I know, sir," he said and slipped a thumb and forefinger into a pocket of his white dinner vest. "I borrowed that one from a jeweler friend of mine yesterday, just in case I might have need of it." He let his gaze wander to his brother, then over to where Dude Farnsworth stood clutching his bullet-shattered hand, looking like a man struck dumb.

"When I saw Dude was there tonight," Dan went on, "I was glad I had borrowed

that fake diamond. The Prince John was the only stone in the collection that would interest birds like Dude and Easy Evans, over there." He looked straight at Farnsworth. "So I switched them, Dude, like you work the old shell game. Right in front of your eyes, too."

Farnsworth's eyes were cold and hard. He shook his head.

"You can't tie anything on me, Parks," he said tight-lipped.

"Nothing but assault with a dangerous weapon, Dude," Dan Parks shot at him. "Plenty more, if Easy dies. But I don't think he will. Okay, clam up, if you like. It's simple to guess . . ."

"You two weren't working together, that's a cinch. You hated each other too much for that. You just spotted Easy at the party, and guessed he'd done the job. That burned you plenty, so you came here to gun it away from him. Maloney and I arrived just as your trigger finger got too itchy. I think the judge will tie a lot on you, Dude. And Easy will have to take the theft rap all alone . . . Here you are, sir."

As Dan spoke the last he pulled the real Prince John diamond from his vest pocket, and taking the fake from Hampton's hand he placed both side by side under a table lamp. The difference in the two stones was very obvious then.

"Easy Evans back, too, eh?" Phil Parks murmured. "I wouldn't have recognized him either. But, confound it, Dan, why didn't you tell us that you had the real stone?"

"I almost did, several times," the younger Parks said. "But I wasn't sure of a few things. The servants for one item. I only knew that I had the real stone. I decided to let the thief think he had it—until something broke, anyway. Something did, so everything's all right now. Look, Phil, will you drive Mr. Hampton back to his home? I guess Mrs. Hampton will be anxious to get this back. And you'd better take charge of it until it's in the safe. Here."

Dan picked up the two diamonds, offered his brother the real one.

"All right," Phil Parks said. "But I want to see you after the doctor's been here, and these two have been put away. All right, Mr. Hampton, we'll be getting back to your wife."

With Hampton leading, the pair walked out of the room, but just as Phil Parks was

[Turn Page]

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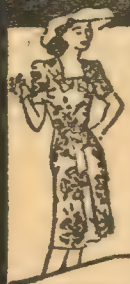

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pulling the door closed Dan stopped him.

"Just a minute, Phil," he said, and grinned. "I just wondered if I could pull it on you, too. You didn't get the right one. You only thought you did. Here it is, Phil. And don't forget about that second grade promotion, will you?"

The Chief of Detectives gulped, looked down at the real Prince John diamond Dan had placed in his hand. His eyes snapped fire, and his mouth opened. But he didn't say anything. He just closed his mouth with a sigh, gave a weary nod of his head, and pulled the door shut behind him.

FEDERAL FLASHES

(Continued from page 8)

gets to his destination he finds he is exactly twenty-four hours late. For it isn't Monday. He hasn't slept just one day through. He's slept *two* days through. It's Tuesday evening!

Bert Royle doesn't think it's funny—to have a couple days for which he can't account. Especially not after he learns that Hugh Clayton, the business rival he'd poked in the jaw, was murdered on Monday night. For Royle has absolutely no alibi for that time except the screwball one that he was asleep for two days. And he is the number-one suspect!

THE MONDAY MURDER by Wayland Rice is a fast-moving crime yarn that will keep you guessing until the last shot is fired, and until the mystery of the missing days is explained.

So be on hand next issue for DOUBLED IN DEATH, by Norman A. Daniels, and THE MONDAY MURDER, by Wayland Rice. They're unbeatable fiction treats. In addition, of course, there will be many other splendid stories and features.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

RIGHT on top of our pile of mail this month is a letter from a soldier in the Pacific.

I am a great fan of G-MEN DETECTIVE. I never used to miss an issue, but it isn't easy to obtain your magazine where I am now. I just can't step around the corner to the newsstand. I was fortunate, however, in running across a copy recently. I certainly enjoyed reading the Dan Fowler novel. I thought it was swell.

How about adding a few lead-slinging women, say something like Sally Vane. Once she was good, but it seems now as though you have put her keeping house again.—*Pvt. Clifton Evans, APO, San Francisco, Calif.*

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Thanks, Private Evans, for your suggestion. We expect to have Sally Vane back in the thick of things very soon. And while you may be partial to Sally Vane, here's a young lady who is partial to the other members of that famous crime-fighting trio.

Hear ye, hear ye. I've got a complaint to make. It's about Dan Fowler and Larry Kendal. I did not like the story DIAMONDS ACROSS THE ATLANTIC. Dan and Larry are supposed to be close friends, but, my gosh, Larry dashes in the story and then he dashes out again. He's just in the story about once or twice. Now is that the way close friends act? Why can't they be together once in a while?

Please, I beg of you, put them together again. I am truly a Dan Fowler and Larry Kendal fan.—*Mary Lee Fenstermacher, Tulsa, Okla.*

All we can say, Mary, is look forward to our next issue. You'll find Dan and Larry working side by side in DOUBLED IN DEATH—and how! Now, here's a letter from an ex-serviceman.

I desire to join your national club, pledging myself to obey and uphold the laws of the nation. Having recently been discharged from the Armed Forces, I would be very proud being a member of your organization.—*Robert Penny, St. Louis, Mo.*

That's fine, Bob. And now how about getting similar letters or postcards from all you other readers who are not now members of the G-MEN CLUB? All you need do to become a member is write us a letter stating your desire to belong to this nation-wide organization for our readers. State that you promise to uphold the laws of the Nation and back the men of the F.B.I. in their fight against crime. There are no dues and no fees, but enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope for your membership card.

If you desire the G-MEN CLUB emblem—which is optional and not a requirement for membership—you may obtain this official insignia, made of solid sterling silver, by enclosing twenty-five cents in stamps or coins with your application. This nominal charge is made merely to cover our expense in mailing this valuable badge.

Your membership card in G-MEN CLUB does not entitle you to any privileges with regard to Federal or local law-enforcement bodies. It simply signifies that you are a good citizen who believes in law and order, and symbolizes your interest in this magazine.

But whether you're a member or not, let's hear your likes and dislikes about what you read in our magazine. We'll be glad to print excerpts from the best letters in this column. Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, G-MEN DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. Thanks, everybody, and happy reading!

—THE EDITOR.

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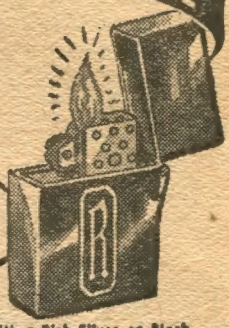

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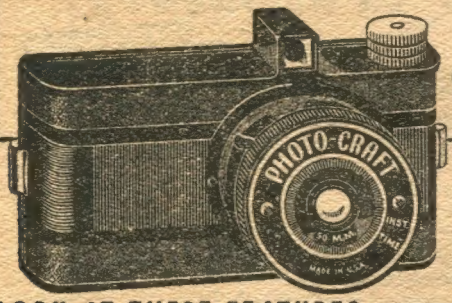

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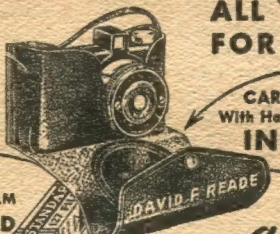

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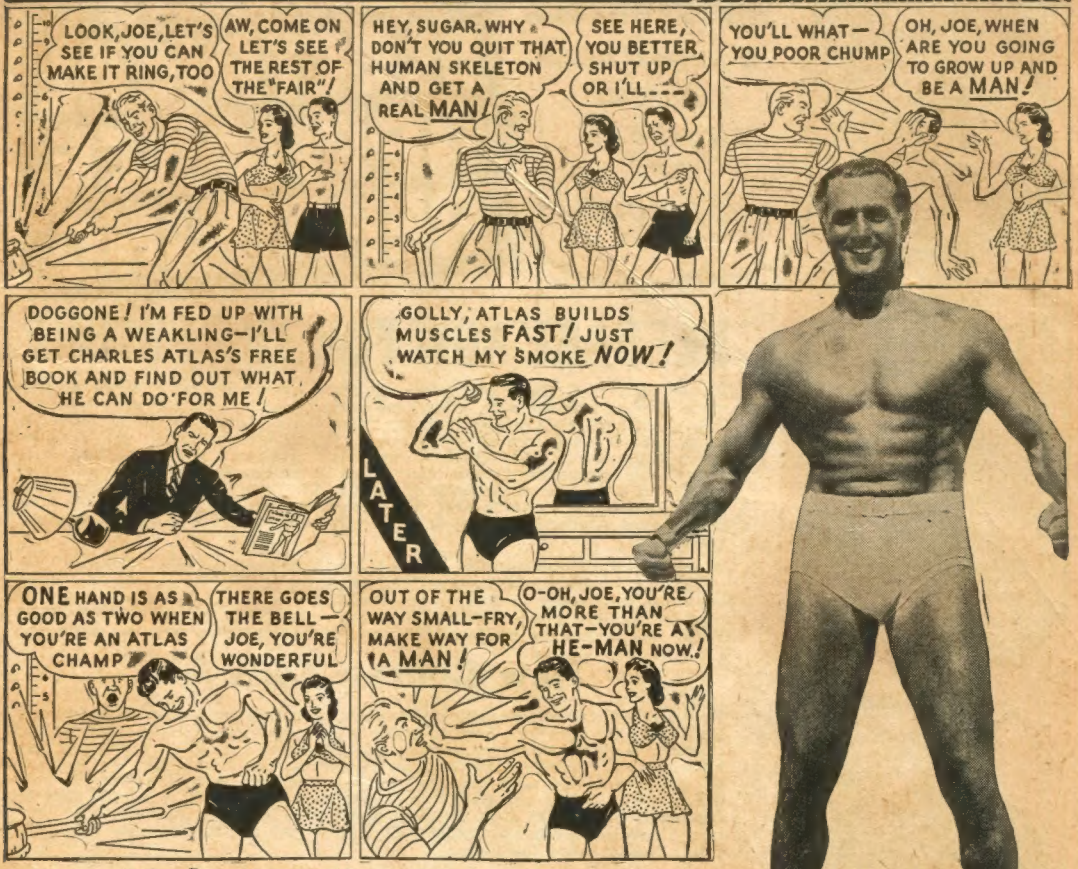
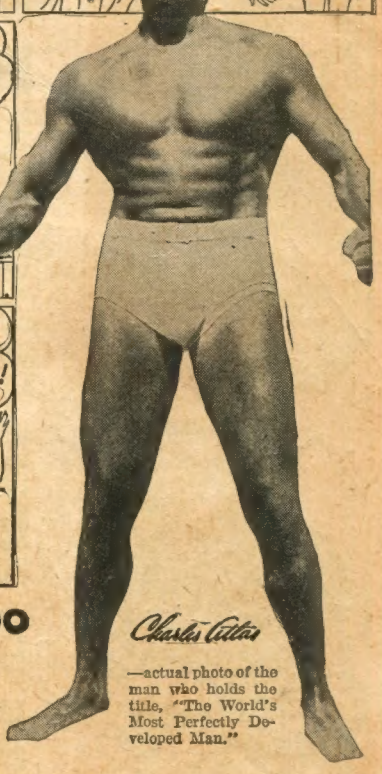
The Insult That Turned a "CHUMP" Into a CHAMP


LOOK, JOE, LET'S SEE IF YOU CAN MAKE IT RING, TOO
AW, COME ON LET'S SEE THE REST OF THE "FAIR"!
HEY, SUGAR. WHY DON'T YOU QUIT THAT HUMAN SKELETON AND GET A REAL MAN!
SEE HERE, YOU BETTER SHUT UP OR I'LL---
YOU'LL WHAT— YOU POOR CHUMP
OH, JOE, WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO GROW UP AND BE A MAN!
DOGGONE! I'M FED UP WITH BEING A WEAKLING—I'LL GET CHARLES ATLAS'S FREE BOOK AND FIND OUT WHAT HE CAN DO FOR ME!
GOLLY, ATLAS BUILDS MUSCLES FAST! JUST WATCH MY SMOKE NOW!
LATER
ONE HAND IS AS GOOD AS TWO WHEN YOU'RE AN ATLAS CHAMP
THERE GOES THE BELL— JOE, YOU'RE WONDERFUL
OUT OF THE WAY SMALL-FRY, MAKE WAY FOR A MAN!
O-OH, JOE, YOU'RE MORE THAN THAT—YOU'RE A HE-MAN NOW!



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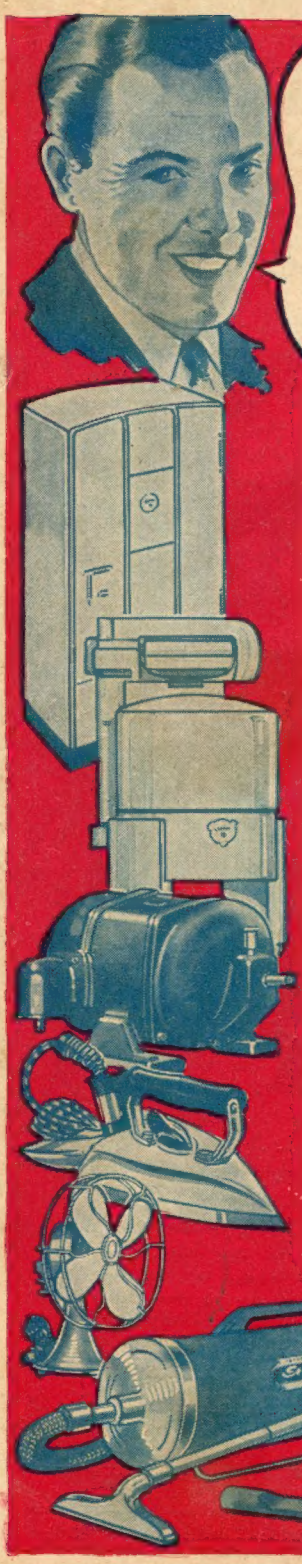

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